AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Baldick is the author of *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848–1932*, 1983.
Archie Brown is a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford.
Craig Brown's most recent book, *The Marsh Marlowe Letters*, was published last year.
Richard Brown's *James Joyce and Sexuality* will be reviewed in the *TLS* shortly.
Quassim Cassam is Fellow-Elect of Oriel College, Oxford.
Anne Chisholm's *Faces of Hiroshima* was published last month.
Patricia Craig is working on a study of Northern Irish poetry and fiction.
Nigel Cross's *The Common Writer: Life in nineteenth-century Grub Street* will be reviewed in the *TLS* shortly.
Arthur C. Danto is Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University.
Malcolm Deas is a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford.
H. T. Dickinson's *Caricatures and the Constitution 1760–1832* will be published later this year.
John Dixon Hunt's books include *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, painting and gardening in the eighteenth century*, 1977.
Owen Dudley Edwards is Reader in History at the University of Edinburgh.
Roy Fuller's *New and Collected Poems 1934–84* was published in June.
Jacques Gernet is the author of *A History of Chinese Civilization*, 1982.
Terence Hawkes's *That Shakespehearean Rag* will be published next spring.
Arthur Jacobs is the compiler of the *New Penguin Dictionary of Music*.
Eric Korn is an antiquarian bookseller in London.
Mary Lago is the editor of *Imperfect Encounter*, the Rothenstein–Tagore correspondence, and co-editor of Tagore's *The Broken Nest* (1974).
Angela Leighton's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* will be published next year.
Laura Marcus is a lecturer in English at the University of Southampton.
Stephen Medcalf is a Reader in English at the University of Sussex.
Roger Nichols is the author of *Messiaen*, 1975.
David Nokes's *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed* will be published later this year.
David Norbrook is the author of *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, 1984.
Edward Norman's books include *A History of Modern Ireland*, 1971.
Frank O'Gorman's books include *The Emergence of the British Two-Party System*, 1982.
Roy Porter's most recent book is *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1982.
Pat Rogers is completing a biography of Sir Joshua Reynolds.
Lorna Sage teaches English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia.
George Schöpflin is a lecturer in East European Political Institutions at the London School of Economics and the School of Slavonic and East European Studies.
Kevin Sharpe has just completed a study, *The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I.*
John Sutherland's most recent book is *Offensive Literature*, 1982.
Laurie Taylor is Professor of Sociology at the University of York.
Charles Tomlinson's *Collected Poems* is published this week and will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the *TLS*.
Charles Townshend's most recent book is *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and resistance since 1848*, 1983.
Hugo Williams's new collection of poems, *Writing Home*, is published this week and reviewed on page 1054.
Christopher Wintle is lecturer in Music at Goldsmiths' College, London.
David Womersley is a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge.
H. R. Woudhuysen is a lecturer in English at University College London.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 245
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than October 18. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date.

Entries marked "Author, Author 245" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on October 25.

1 The place is like a vast drawing room lighted enough by the gas from the arcades all round the square under which sit all the Ladies and Gentlemen at their coffee, iced water and cigars with a dense crowd in the centre of men, women, children, soldiers, Turks, magnificent Greek costumes and sky above studded with innumerable twinkling stars.

2 A mist of heat hung over the dome and white campanile, beyond the glittering greenish stretch of water, across the surface of which needles of light perpetually flashed. It was so calm the halcyon's fabled nest seemed just to have floated by, subduing the faintest tremor of wind and wave.

3 The night was heavy and overcast: nothing could be distinctly seen. The canal beneath the window looked like a black gulf; the opposite houses were barely visible as a row of shadows, dimly relieved against the starless and moonless sky. At long intervals, the warning cry of a belated gondolier was just audible, as he turned the corner of a distant canal, and called to invisible boats which might be approaching him in the darkness. Now and then, the nearer dip of an oar in the water told of the viewless passage of other gondolas bringing guests back to the hotel. Excepting these rare sounds, the mysterious night-silence of Venice was literally the silence of the grave.

Competition No 240
Winner: C. F. Fergusson
Answers:
1 Ralph was an Eton boy, and hence, being robust, a swimmer and a cricketer. A swimmer and a cricketer is nowhere to be scorned in youth's republic.
George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, chapter 2.

2 She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird or watering a rose-bush.
Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, chapter 1.

3 "And your Aunt Elizabeth, in a college group wearing large cricket pads – Newnham is it?... Became a doctor did she? I never knew Mrs Robinson had been a doctor; why did she give it up? She left six forceps in? But that's nothing, surely. Oh, all in the same wound? Yes I suppose that would be rather many. *And* three swabs? Well, I dare say her mind was on cricket."
Rose Macaulay, *Personal Pleasures*.

FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS *of September 26, 1935, published a review by I. A. Williams of Malcolm Cowley's* Exile's Return: A narrative of ideas, *from which the following extracts are taken:*

Mr. Cowley . . . has set out to paint the portrait of the literary generation to which he himself belongs, that of the writers who came to manhood about the time when America entered the War . . . . After the War came New York, "where everyone you met came from another town and tried to forget it," and two or three years of life in Greenwich Village, the more or less genuine Bohemian quarter of the city, during which the idea of "salvation by exile" gradually grew in intensity. "They do things better in Europe: let's go there"; and, upon one excuse or another, a great number of American intellectuals, Mr. Cowley among others, went there . . . to wander about from place to place in growing unhappiness and discontent, and eventually to return to America. Some returned merely because their money ran out. Others because from a distance they began to see that American civilization had an outline of its own, and to feel that the great period of mechanical development and material prosperity, the latter half of the nineteen-twenties, offered the possibility of a distinctive and individual American culture. As a sort of postscript . . . comes the overthrow of these ideas in the depression, and the increasingly political trend of the writers of what Miss Gertrude Stein once called "The Lost Generation" . . . .

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Bernard Williams

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Two months ago I was in a country where, in a dreadful economic situation, surrounded by memories of a recent and very nasty tyranny, and conscious that the forces that had sustained the tyranny had not simply disappeared, people close to the government were discussing in a very concerned and scrupulous way the limits of free speech; the independence of the judiciary; the extent to which justice requires the law to be definite and not to rely on vague and catch-all phrases; how far it is an adequate defence of what public servants may do that they are obeying orders or carrying out the policies of government. Lawyers, philosophers, administrators in that country are struggling to place a democracy securely on ground that for the past fifty years has not been at all receptive to it, and they are trying to do so in a way that makes intellectual sense.

That country is Argentina, and it is one of several deep ironies that surround Britain's relations to it that the new democratic government there should be seriously concerned with a correct understanding of these questions of individual rights, while the British government tries to discipline its public servants with a vague law that no one with any respect for rights can accept, and British judges are prepared to interpret that law with formulae that would certainly, now, be unacceptable in Argentina. It is a further irony that the most recent and dramatic case in which that law was brought to bear, the prosecution of Clive Ponting, was concerned with the conduct of the war to which, together with the junta's own folly, the present Argentinian government owes its existence.

Argentina's democratic government is probably Mrs Thatcher's finest achievement. She does not seem to value that achievement, as opposed to having won a war "against Argentina"; if she did, she would allow the diplomats to be a little more flexible in their formulations about the future – the distant future – of the Falklands, as it is rumoured that they would like to be. There are virtually no Argentinians who doubt that the islands belong to Argentina, and while the subject is not at the top of any agenda, it might be important to the Argentinian government that it could show some progress on the question. At the moment the democratic government still has breathing-space, because the military are discredited and anti-democratic opponents are tainted by association with them. But it needs all the help it can get, and it might help if it could point to a trace of a hope of future negotiation. If British policy insists on being as obstinate with the democracy as with the junta, it neglects the only good thing that the war achieved.

Members of the junta are now on trial, before a civilian court. The government has been accused of insufficient zeal in pursuing the crimes of the previous régime; while I was in Buenos Aires, a party of Socialist members of the European Parliament arrived to give the Argentinians the benefit of their disapproval on this subject. The complaints are that the authorities have taken too long and that they are not prosecuting enough people. There was a purpose behind the delay. For both constitutional and political reasons, the military had first to be given the option of dealing with the crimes in a military court. They had a predictable difficulty in either accepting or refusing, and did nothing. When the time-limit expired, the cases came to a civilian court, a procedure which also brings with it television coverage, which has been giving the Argentinian people a sustained and painful history of the junta's activities.

The question of how many should be prosecuted, and how far down the line punishment should travel, raises the issue of the "Nuremberg principle", whether acting under military orders can count as a defence for acts that would otherwise be criminal. It also raises questions of policy. An indefinite campaign to pursue everyone who has committed brutal acts under the previous régime may not be the best way to reconcile the better elements of the military to a democratic government, or to help people to take the existence of that government as an irreversible fact.

The questions of principle that interest the thoughtful people close to President Alfonsín run in the other direction as well. How far should those in command be held responsible for brutalities if they did not authorize or know about them? In practice, however, a lot of evidence at the trial suggests that these were not commanders whose behaviour need raise any very refined questions of this kind. A notorious instance quoted to us was the matter of the undertakers of Córdoba, who wrote to the then President (not Galtieri) to seek compensation for the extra work generated by the large detention centre in that city: the President replied that they had a case, but their submission should properly be made to the governor of the province.

Another, perhaps more typical, example came up at the trial on the afternoon we had the opportunity to visit it. A young woman appeared, a schoolteacher, who had been associated with the trade union. Her evidence was that one evening she had been picked up, thrown into one of the famous Ford Falcons, taken to a detention centre, and tortured. Later, her blindfold was removed, and she was confronted by an imposing military figure. "You know who I am?" he said; it was Galtieri. "You know that I have the power of life and death over you?" She accepted it. "What is your name?" She told him. "It is the name of my daughter. You may live."

Granted a recent history of such crude and melodramatic tyranny, the concern shown by the present decent and determined government for human rights and for their detailed interpretation may seem to some heroic or even quixotic. To the people we talked to who were associated with government it seemed, simply, essential; if they did not do everything they could to stick to the rules and to develop respect for them, their government was nothing and there was no reason why they should be in power rather than someone else. Many British people, I suspect, may cheerfully agree with them to the extent of thinking that such practices may well be a good thing *for Argentina*. It is a typical British reaction to think that an insistence on formulating individual rights may be needed in a country that lacks a democratic tradition, a history of orderly change and citizenly good sense – it is part of the price one pays for an unhappy history: in a country such as ours, however, where a better past has left us with a shared sense of what counts as fair and reasonable behaviour, such obsessions are irrelevant and probably damaging.

Clive Ponting's book, *The Right to Know*, is important not just for what it tells about the history of the sinking of the Argentinian ship General Belgrano, but because it shows particularly clearly that these complacent assumptions about British life and the justice of our arrangements will not do. On the history itself, only an expert in the complex subject that Tam Dalyell calls "Belgrano studies" could say whether all the details are correct. Even those who know about these events only by following the newspapers will recognize that there is at least one matter – his delay in owning up – that Ponting passes over. Occasionally it is less than clear what is report and what is speculation – on the question, for instance, whether the commander of HMS Conqueror, the submarine that sank the Belgrano, sought confirmation of the order to do so. But in general it is a well-told, unpretentious and impressive tale. It is forgivable, I think, that Ponting should emphasize the respects in which Dalyell was right in his dogged pursuit of the government, and should say little about the wilder suggestions which may have done something to leave the impression that this is a crank's and bore's subject raising no very substantial issues. It is certainly not that. Beyond the immediate issues, which are important enough, of how this government behaved, the affair raises central questions about our political culture.

The circumstances surrounding the decisions that empowered the Navy to sink the Belgrano on May 2, 1982, when it had been sailing away from the Task Force for eleven hours, are very clearly set out, so far as they are known: in a few important respects, they remain obscure. Ponting does not press any charges against the government in the matter of the sinking itself or the motives for authorizing it. His accusations are aimed at the subsequent cover-up. This started from Mr Nott's statement to the House of Commons on May 4 which contained three major errors of fact, when correct information had been available for thirty-six hours. False or misleading statements were included in the White Paper and the Official Dispatch which were published in December 1982, while various prevaricating answers were given in Parliament to the tireless Dalyell. Ponting gives a summary of six falsehoods that were several times repeated about the position and course of the Belgrano when it was sunk, the time of the order to attack it, and other matters. By March 1984, the Government was under increasing political pressure about its story, and Ponting, as a senior official at the Ministry of Defence, was asked to write a paper giving a detailed chronology of the events leading to the attack: this was the paper that came to be called "The Crown Jewels".

Ponting gives a very interesting account of

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some ministerial discussions about what should be done with this material. Heseltine was at first in favour of giving more information, but backed away from this, and in fact admitted to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on November 7, 1984, that his objection to telling some of the truth had been that he might have to tell more of it. Evasions continued, in reply to letters from Dalyell and from Denzil Davies, in answer to Parliamentary questions, and in preparing answers for the Select Committee. In all this, there was one Minister who, according to Ponting, always recommended as strongly as he could that they should tell a simple lie, that all the relevant information was classified: this was John Stanley, who is still, as he was then, a junior Defence Minister. It was when the Select Committee had been deceived that Ponting blew the whistle, revealed the relevant facts to Dalyell and was eventually prosecuted under Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

The questions of principle raised by Ponting's account are closely connected with that very bad law. Section 2 of it is concerned with what is called "the unauthorised communication of official information by a Crown servant". "Official information" means any information (secret or not) that a government servant acquires in the way of duty: it thus means virtually anything. An "unauthorised communication" is said to be a communication to someone other than a person to whom the public servant is authorized to communicate it, or to whom it is in the interests of the state that he or she should communicate it. Ponting's case is not only the most recent and one of the most dramatic cases brought under this section; it also elicited from the judge, Mr Justice McCowan, an interpretation of this provision which managed to shock even *The Times* and which, with any luck, will help in the long run to bring it about that the Act, already discredited, will be seen to be indefensible and will be repealed, as the Franks Committee indeed recommended in 1972 that it should be. What McCowan was reported as saying was that the policies of the State had to be understood as the policies of the government in power. As an interpretation of the Act, this is in fact very peculiar, since the Act refers not to the policies of the State, but to its *interests*. Even McCowan, presumably, if he thought about it, would find it hard to claim that the interests of the State were identical with those of the party in power, so it is actually obscure what he thought he was saying, except that Ponting should be convicted, a proposal which the jury laudably resisted.

It is not a good idea to have an Act – any Act, but particularly one covering matters so closely connected with the public interest – that has such vague and threatening scope. It is also not a good idea to have judges who do not care, or who are unable to think, what the principles underlying such a law might reasonably be; and one of several important lessons of Ponting's case is that we have good reason to distrust a legal culture which does not train judges to reflect in any coherent way about the point and the limits of the law.

We certainly need new provisions to secure freedom of information, and another important lesson of this case is not merely that this is so, but that a standard line of argument used against such proposals is worthless. Ponting quotes Mrs Thatcher, who in 1984 argued against the Freedom of Information Campaign with the usual claim that freedom of information would diminish Parliament and reduce Ministers' answerability to it.

As a reply to the issues raised by this case and by the Belgrano affair, this entirely misses the point. It was only because Ministers had been misleading Parliament – individual Members and a Select Committee alike – and intended to go on doing so, that Ponting acted as he did. Perhaps there was a time when conventions of ministerial behaviour were strong enough to make it safe to rely on the pressures that Parliament can apply. If there was such a time, it was those conventions, and not just Parliament, that were protecting us; in any case, if there was such a time, it has gone. In this respect, as in others, we have to recognize that the tacit understandings which used to make Britain a relatively liberal country have lost their power, and we must develop a more explicit style of political culture, based on new institutions to guarantee stated and enforceable rights.

Any legislation designed to increase the information available in society, and make us less liable than Britain notably is to deceit and mystification, has to be based on careful thought about the point of our having access to various kinds of information. There is no general "right to know", in the sense that if you would merely like to know a certain thing, then people, unless there are very special reasons, are obliged to let you know it. The mere fact that members of the public are interested in certain information, or a journalist thinks that they will be, does not give them, or him, a right to that information. What is true is that there are vital interests, individual and collective, that can be safeguarded only granted access to relevant information.

The actions and policies of government are not the only areas in which our vital interests require knowledge to be available. Judith Cook's crisp and densely informed book, *The Price of Freedom*, which offers a forceful argument as well as a compelling collection of horror stories about the British reliance on secrecy, touches a number of such areas, including nuclear power policy and medical research. She also discusses the different kind of case in which an individual has a special right to know certain information because that information is about him or her. But the business of government must be a special case, because it affects so many vital interests, and because of what democracy is supposed to be. Granted certain obvious exceptions, of which the genuine concerns of national security are indeed one, the assumption should be that what government is up to is in all senses the public's business.

We urgently need institutions to put that assumption into practice. I am not saying that the Ford Falcons, or their British equivalent, are an imminent threat; it is a mistake, the same old British mistake, to think that it is only in those circumstances that they are necessary. We need them also to provide some protection against prejudiced, lazy and poorly argued decisions, which at the moment are hidden within the circular wall of Whitehall's typical assumption that since the administration knows more than other people, interventions by those people can only be poorly informed and useless, so there is no point in giving out more information.

Freedom of information has a lot to do with avoiding oppressive government, corruption and complacent inefficiency, but it is not simply to be seen as a means. It is more intimately involved than that in the proper relations between government and people in a democratic and liberal state. Suppression of public information not only may lead to tyranny – in its own way, it is tyranny. The friends of liberty in Argentina understand that, and we should do so as well.

Revolution or watershed?

Frances Cairncross

PAOLO FILO DELLA TORRE
Viva Britannia: Mrs Thatcher's Britain
101pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £9.95.
0283 991437
MARGARET JONES
Thatcher's Kingdom: A view of Britain in the Eighties
391pp. Collins. £9.95.
0002173018
MICHAEL MORAN
Politics and Society in Britain
226pp. Macmillan. £20 (paperback, £5.95).
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PATRICK COSGRAVE
Carrington: A life and a policy
182pp. Dent. £10.95.
0460 046918

At next week's Conservative Party conference, there will no doubt be a good deal of talk of the Thatcher years, and of the changes which they have – or might have – brought about. Now two astute foreign journalists have described the era as it appears to resident outsiders. Their books are rather comforting, if only because they both manage to find such a lot of things to like about Britain. But it is hard to imagine who in this country would buy Paolo Filo della Torre's brief and jolly *Viva Britannia*, or Margaret Jones's longer and more meandering *Thatcher's Kingdom*. For neither answers the questions which are really exciting about the Thatcher years. Are we all living through a revolution? Will this appear to be a turning-point in British history? Or has Mrs Thatcher's original revolutionary instinct been defeated by the vast conservative weight of the immovable British public?

A revolutionary is certainly what she set out to be. Margaret Jones is a sceptical Australian who feels as uncomfortable as any *Guardian* reader with Mrs Thatcher's radicalism. Della Torre is an Italian who admires the Prime Minister as much for her good looks as for her will-power, and remembers with excitement the intense interest of foreign observers in the Conservative opposition in the 1970s, when Thatcher's [illegible] sole aim was to reverse much of what had been considered enlightened legislation by successive governments over the previous thirty years, and who was thirsting to force back the frontiers of government control of economic activity.

It has not quite come out like that. The government which presided over the peak output of Britain's North Sea oil has had, for its most obvious achievement, the destruction of about a quarter of the country's manufacturing jobs and a victory in a rather expensive war for a bleak little island on the other side of the world. But revolution? Education vouchers, the two-tier health service, the end of wages councils, the reform of local government – all have been abandoned or bungled. The massive Parliamentary majority of 1983 has been used, not as a springboard for revolution but as a safety-net for stumbling ministers. The reform of social security, now under way, looks like labouring mightily to produce a mouse; the reform of personal taxation has been put off until after the next election.

It is hard to imagine that Thatcher wanted this result. She hates diplomacy, loves confrontation, detests negotiation for negotiation's sake. That may be rough on the Foreign Office (which prefers genteel duplicity to public nastiness), but it has brought some notable successes. It also seems to have done for Britain abroad roughly what General de Gaulle did for France. (Della Torre quotes an admiring President Mitterrand: Thatcher has "les yeux de Caligula et la bouche de Marilyn Monroe". The trouble is, domestic policy and especially economic and social policy is a lot less susceptible to the mixture of confrontation and contralto charm.

A revolution may still be under way in Britain: though if so, it is a revolution which Mrs Thatcher personifies, rather than creates. There is a hint of it in Michael Moran's *Politics and Society in Britain*, modestly presented as an A level text, but which is, in fact, a riveting read for anyone who wants to understand what has been happening to the British electorate. As it emerges from Moran's pages, the old mould of British politics has been chipped away on three sides. First and most important, the role of class in determining voting patterns has been eroded. The class structure itself has been fragmenting. Income inequalities have been eroded. Economic growth has created more opportunities for everyone. And the services revolution – the great spread of white-collar jobs – has produced a vast new class of non-manual workers, coming from very diverse social backgrounds. The disappearance of the manual worker has eroded Labour's traditional support, and forced the party to try to broaden its appeal. And the rise of a new middle class has forced the Conservative Party to change, too, to try to capture this new breed of elector.

Two other shocks have struck the political system. The two main political parties have lost not just electoral support, but individual members, too. Labour's proportional loss has been the greatest, but the largest loss in absolute terms has been suffered by the Conservatives, whose membership has halved in three decades. Young, educated, middle-class electors have turned instead to pressure groups and to broadly based political movements (like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). These extra-Parliamentary groups have become the main way in which the new young middle class enters politics.

Moreover, as single-issue politics has attracted more young activists, so the coalition of policies and interests which constitutes the two main parties has come under more strain. For in the 1970s, each party in turn had a damaging experience in government. First, a radical Tory government (remember Selsdon Man?) was forced into a famous U-turn by the violent pressure of world inflation, and left office in disgrace after an unsuccessful experiment pursuing an incomes policy. Then a Labour government was also forced into a U-turn of a different sort by pressures from the world economy. While the Thatcher opposition in the 1970s was talking about breaking with the post-war consensus on everything from health care to incomes policy, the Labour government after 1976 destroyed the broadest pillar of post-war consensus: the commitment to full employment.

If Thatcher has failed to create a revolution, this may be partly because it is not obvious what sort of new consensus will emerge from the social changes which have taken place in Britain. It may also be that the Conservative Party is not the natural source of significant change in British politics. It has been the natural party of government this century, running the country, either alone or in coalition, for two years out of every three. But the big changes – the Welfare State, the development of monetary policy – have taken place more often than not under Labour governments.

There has, however, been a revolution in mood. Della Torre claims that Mrs Thatcher "fully understands what rich, left-wing theoreticians never understand: egalitarian aspirations have never been part of working-class culture. People do not want to be equal to their neighbours – they want to be more affluent than their neighbours." Mrs Thatcher has "created a Britain where hard work, risk and imagination really can pay". It is not a world in which the Carringtons of this world feel much at home. This emerges clearly from Patrick Cosgrave's *Carrington*. And it is the Carringtons, with their taste for diplomacy rather than a good scrap, with their tradition of service rather than the vulgar pursuit of personal success, who represent the qualities which the hypocritical English elector most admires. If Thatcher does not enjoy a third term, that is more likely to be the reason than her failure to push through dramatic changes in the way Britain is run. But her years may still turn out to mark a sort of watershed. Politics in Britain from now on is more likely to polarize between the private sector and the public than between the working class and the middle class. The Labour Party, with its core of public sector employees, whose numbers increasingly dominate Britain's trade unions, is more and more the defender of Britain's public services; the Conservative Party, with its solicitors, advertising agents and small businessmen, the party of the private sector.

Moreover, it is just possible that Mrs Thatcher may one day appear as the architect of Britain's economic revival. Mass production is not something the British have shown themselves to be very good at. It is now increasingly the preserve of the Third World. Specialized manufacture, financial and other services, tourism and the arts are things which Britain does amazingly well. We are rather good at producing computer software, as well as the hardware and software of burgeoning telecommunications. Could it be that a nation of small businessmen, two decades from now, will venerate the Blessed Margaret as the lady under whose hard-headed reign Britain's post-industrial revival at last began?

From the private office

David Carlton

JOHN COLVILLE
The Fringes of Power: Downing Street diaries 1939–1955
796pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £14.95.
0340 382961

The bulk of the entries in Sir John Colville's diaries, now for the first time published *in extenso*, concentrate on the years when he really was only on the fringes of power. For his marriage in October 1948 to Lady Margaret Egerton marked the beginning of the end of his career as a political diarist, and thus as an invaluable source for future historians. As Colville shamefacedly confesses: "The diary I kept during Churchill's second administration was spasmodic, and latterly confined largely to foreign journeys; for though marriage is an honourable estate, it is seldom a tonic for diarists unless they behave like Pepys." It is a pity therefore that his own days of personal glory still lay ahead.

Colville began his service in the private office at Number Ten in October 1939 in a junior role, under the much-underestimated Sir Arthur Rucker, and was to all appearances a loyal Chamberlainite. But he, unlike Rucker, survived the change of premiership in May 1940 and served in Churchill's private office until September 1941, and again from December 1943 until the end of the European war. There is, of course, much interest in these sections of the diary – not least as we accompany the author day by day through the anguish and exhilaration of the Blitz. And happily the interest is not confined exclusively to the world of politics. For Colville was well connected in aristocratic society and evidently enjoyed dining out and being a guest in numerous country houses. In the final analysis, however, it is the political content which will attract most attention. In particular, Colville was uniquely placed to record the contrast between the wartime aims, policies and practices of Chamberlain and Churchill.

During the "Phoney War" Colville appears to have shared the Chamberlainite desire to see an honourable compromise peace with Germany. But unfortunately there were some powerful forces on the other side. "I am afraid", he wrote on October 27, 1939, "that the F.O. are rather defeatist about the possibility of procuring peace." He also records without dissent the view of the Hungarian Regent, Nicholas Horthy, that "it is on the fields of Europe ploughed by German and Allied gunfire that the seeds of Bolshevism will take root". As for Churchill's prospect of succeeding Chamberlain in the event of serious military reverses, Colville reacted with a stout "God forbid!"

It is thus no surprise to learn that Colville was invited to join Lord Dunglass (now Lord Home), R. A. Butler and "Chips" Channon on May 10, 1940, the day of Chamberlain's fall, in drinking in champagne "the health of the 'King over the Water' (not King Leopold but Mr Chamberlain)". Yet Churchill saw fit to retain Colville's services and the latter, with an agility even Butler must have envied, presently became an ultra-loyal supporter of the new court.

One follows, however, the course of the diarist's metamorphosis, and even apostasy, without distaste. For in 1940 he was a mere twenty-five-year-old. And both Chamberlain and Churchill were far-sighted patriots with more in common than is usually recognized. Indeed, it is possible to make a case for either having been the greatest British statesman of the century. Nowadays Colville would obviously cast his vote for Churchill. But he is sufficiently open-minded – and, one guesses, sufficiently anti-Soviet – to reveal that late in 1940 he received, evidently with more interest than annoyance, a letter from Rucker, Chamberlain's loyal aide, declaring: "Neville's last months were a bitter tragedy but I believe that he will some day be regarded as the greatest Englishman of his times."

Between 1951 and 1955 he served as Joint Principal Private Secretary to Winston Churchill – a post of exceptional importance in circumstances where the nominal head of government was physically and mentally incapacitated for long periods. Indeed, it has been suggested that after Churchill suffered a major stroke in June 1953 Colville was virtually our "unknown prime minister". Moreover, given that some respected authorities – for example, Professor W. N. Medlicott – consider the Conservative Government of 1951–5 to have been the most successful peacetime administration of this century, Colville could have had no good reason for embracing false modesty in the matter. But if historians do eventually reach a consensus about whether or not he was a prime minister in all but name, they will be unable to do so on the basis of his intermittent and sketchy diary entries for the crucial period.

All that Colville offers us on the subject of his unusual role following Chruchill's stroke are a few elliptical sentences written many years after. Instructed by Churchill to conceal his incapacity, Colville on his own initiative approached the leading press barons who in turn achieved "the all but incredible, and in peace-time possibly unique, success of gagging Fleet Street". But he and others in the Prime Minister's Private Office had another problem: "we had to be careful not to allow our own judgment to be given Prime Ministerial effect. To have done so, as we could without too great difficulty, would have been a constitutional outrage." But at least one "constitutional outrage" is admitted: "in the unusual circumstances prevailing, it seemed to me that, whatever the rules might be, Christopher [Soames, the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary] should be given access to many papers he was not supposed to see." We are left to speculate whether other "outrages" may have occurred. One may perhaps read a little between the lines, however, when one reflects on Colville's final and possibly understated comment on the implications of Churchill's stroke:

> Before the end of July [1953] the Prime Minister was sufficiently restored to take an intelligent interest in affairs of state and express his own decisive views. Christopher and I then returned to the fringes of power, having for a time been drawn perilously close to the centre. For the next two years the distance between the fringes and the centre was far shorter than it had once been.

During these vital two years Colville's diary, then, concentrates almost exclusively on foreign affairs. But I am in a position to confirm that the largely unpublished diary of Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, is far more detailed and revealing. And even Lord Moran, for all that Colville ungenerously dismisses him as somebody who was "never present when history was made, though he was quite often invited to luncheon afterwards", gives us at least as rounded a picture of Churchill's foreign policy.

On the whole, Colville does no more than confirm what is already known: that Churchill came to disapprove of Eden and did not wish to hand over the premiership to him; that he fought almost single-handedly for *détente* with the Soviet Union in the face of hostility from Washington and his own Foreign Office; and that only characteristic clumsiness by Moscow prevented a serious Cabinet split on the issue of a possible summit between Churchill and Georgi Malěnkov. If there is a new point it is the degree to which Churchill disapproved of President Eisenhower. He blamed him for not occupying Berlin, Vienna and Prague in 1945. And now in the 1950s he saw him as having the contrary fault: a reckless inclination to risk war with the Russians.

That Churchill had emerged by the 1950s as the foremost "appeaser" among Western statesmen may occasion some surprise. But perhaps this only reflected the extent to which he had come to doubt the value of his own earlier contribution. For example, Colville records that as early as February 1945, Churchill, after listening to *The Mikado* played on a gramophone, was moved to sombre reflection which revealed his grasp of what might be facing his country notwithstanding what had happened in 1940:

> The P.M. said it brought back "the Victorian era, eighty years which will rank in our island history with the Antonine age". Now, however, "the shadows of victory" were upon us. In 1940 the issue was clear and he could see distinctly what was to be done. But when Harris had finished his destruction of Germany, "What will lie between the white snows of Russia and the white cliffs of Dover?"

The mood of the 1870s

Michael Bentley

MARVIN SWARTZ
The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone
221pp. Macmillan £25.
0333 382552

Marvin Swartz gives us here a clear description of high-political opinion about "foreign politics" during Disraeli's government of 1874–80. To this he adds: a section on Egypt which rather cuts across the previous narrative; three documentary appendixes; and nearly fifty pages of end notes offering an impressive range of primary sources. Yet in the end we have 144 pages of text which a vigorous boiling down would further reduce to a ninety-page narrative quarried from the archives, and stronger on the Conservatives than the Liberals.

Swartz has a shrewd eye for evocative material and his archival snippets are often fresh and interesting. One could do more – indeed he could have done more – with Monty Corry's reassuring Disraeli that "I do not yet see the people pulling down the railings of Hyde Park, for an idea in Turkey": a luminous reminder that the Eastern Question often struck politically aware Victorians as hardly worth answering. Salisbury's cynicism (though not his other facets) appears authentically in a string of pungent remarks. The Derby correspondence and diaries, to which Swartz pays particular attention, build into an impression of heroism as Derby comes more and more to resemble a stiff-necked godfather to the author's other (enthusiasm), E. D. Morel. Judgment on the [illegible] can perhaps wait until John Vincent's edition of the materials is fully available; but certainly this account lends Derby an appropriate prominence, not least in order to acknowledge the embarrassments caused by his indiscreet wife, by whom the Palace had long since ceased to be amused.

The issues over which these recorded opinions play hardly demanded, and do not receive, extensive retelling: the Suez purchase, the Bulgarian agitation, the Russo-Turkish war, the Congress of Berlin, Afghanistan, the Zulus, Midlothian, Egypt. Situating them within a tissue of contemporary opinion has, on the other hand, proved helpful and Swartz's account gives a good sense of the mood in the second half of the 1870s. One feels less comfortable with his rationale for identifying these years from 1874 to 1882 as being of distinctive importance. Here his reflections about the rise of democracy are brought into play, and the foreign policy of the 1870s comes out as having a peculiarly "political" flavour in the wake of the Second Reform Act and Disraeli's need to control the new public brought into existence by extended suffrage. Monty Corry apart, however, it seems not at all clear that this whig-democratic perspective best explains the nature of mid-Victorian foreign policy. Two other explanations suggest themselves. The first is that the pressure on politicians from the new intelligentsia gained force from the wave of periodicals launched in the 1860s. A second explanation lies in the degree to which the Foreign Office and its dependent institutions and personnel underwent fundamental change in these years: the office that prepared itself for Salisbury's visits in the 1890s had become a very different body of men from that which cowered under Palmerston. Both points are raised in this study but, like a good many other more structural observations, they never come into focus [illegible]

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A temperament in crisis

J. Mordaunt Crook

RICHARD DORMENT
Alfred Gilbert
350pp. Yale University Press. £19.95.
0300033885

The story of Alfred Gilbert is a biographer's dream and an art historian's nightmare. For the biographer: romance, drink, drugs; hints of dishonesty and fraud, and all the torments of egomania. For the art historian: endless confusion between prototype, variant and replica – the sort of confusion, in fact, which makes a definitive catalogue wellnigh impossible. Richard Dorment admits his problem at the outset. "This is not the last biography of Alfred Gilbert to be written", he explains. "I have not attempted to compile a catalogue, or to illustrate even a portion of the works." The author's objective, therefore, is limited. But those limitations turn out to be his trump cards. He has produced an absorbing study of an artistic temperament in a state of recurrent crisis – a portrait, warts and all, of the Romantic Artist.

Dorment had four predecessors: Joseph Hatton, Isabel McAllister, Adrian Bury and Lavinia Handley-Read. Hatton's approach (1903) was basically that of an interviewer who was both credulous and over-polite. McAllister's *Alfred Gilbert* (1929) was eulogy rather than art history: after all, she was in love with her subject. And Bury's *Shadow of Eros* (1953) was a belated obituary notice rather than a biography: Bury – Albert Bührer – was the sculptor's loyal nephew. In all three, little effort was made to explain the tortuous story of Gilbert's inner life and its expression in, and through, his work. The approach adopted by Lavinia Handley-Read was rather different. She understood only too well – through bitter personal experience – the traumas of a perfectionist mind. But in her articles (*Apollo*, 1967; *Connoisseur*, 1968), and in the revealing exhibition which she organized (Fine Art Society, 1968), she employed the techniques of a connoisseur rather than the methods of a biographer. She set out to treat Gilbert not only as a creative genius in his own right, but as part of an evolving tradition in sculpture, Gothic as well as Renaissance. In pursuit of that objective, she drew upon formidable academic skills and a terrifying intensity of commitment. Inheriting her findings – and some of her papers – Dorment has added many insights and discoveries of his own. The result is a book of substance.

Alfred Gilbert was fortunate, and unfortunate, in his patrons. Joseph Edgar Boehm, his first tutor in art, and in the ways of the world; Lord Leighton, the Maecaenas of the Royal Academy; the eccentric Baroness von Fahnenberg; Lady Arthur Russell, patient and sympathetic; Princess Louise and Queen Alexandra, staunch backers in times of disgrace; and lovely, doomed Eliza Macloghlin, mad ally of his declining years. Without Boehm – who died in the arms of Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise – royal patronage would never have come his way. Without Leighton, his meteoric early career would certainly have been impossible. "I can only say", Gilbert recalled in 1896, "that all I know, and all the little I have been able to do as a sculptor, I owe to Leighton." Certainly Leighton made him, and Leighton's death removed almost his last financial prop: "Alas for Leighton! What a friend to have lost, and at the very moment when his life would have saved my living death." Later patrons were less understanding. The Shaftesbury Memorial Committee left Gilbert to pick up a bill for £4,000 for the privilege of creating "Eros" – a formidable sum for the 1880s. The House of Commons first commissioned, then rejected, his statue of John Bright (it was eventually rescued for the National Liberal Club). And the citizens of Winchester seem never to have been able to make up their minds on either the material or the location of his imperious monument to Queen Victoria.

Gilbert's stylistic development is intriguing. "The Kiss of Victory" (1878–81) was a product of his brief stay at the École des Beaux Arts: its model was Canova's "Cupid and Psyche"; its inspiration Gustave Doré. That phase was quickly over. Next came his crucial trip to Italy: "I availed myself of an opportunity to visit Florence and there it was that the scales fell from my eyes. I saw, for the first time in my life, the works of the fathers of the Renaissance." "Perseus Arming" (1882) and "Icarus" (1884), therefore, are Florentine rather than Parisian; Cellini and Donatello rather than Mercié or Rodin. With "Post Equitem Sedet Atra Cura" (1883–7) it is Donatello and Verrocchio again, but this time with a dash of Dürer. And it was Dürer's mannerisms which next supplied Gilbert with exactly what he was seeking: a series of stepping stones from Classic to Gothic. "The Enchanted Chair" (1886) signals this new departure. Henceforward the creator of "Icarus" will seek his inspiration not in the Bargello at Florence but in the complexities of St Sebald's shrine at Nuremberg or the weird convolutions of Burne-Jones's "Briar Rose". By his early thirties, Gilbert had found himself. He had discovered a formula – Pre-Raphaelitism in three dimensions – gloriously capable of indefinite adaptation: in the coruscating statuettes of the Fawcett Memorial (1887), the Jubilee Epergne (1887–90) and the Clarence Memorial, Windsor (1892–1901); in the Baroque rotundities of Winchester's Jubilee Queen (1887); in the *art nouveau* contortions of Queen Alexandra's Memorial in St James's (1926–32).

Dorment deftly explains this stylistic evolution in biographical terms. Gilbert, more than most artists, saw life and art as indivisible. His youthful entry for the Royal Academy competition of 1873 is almost comically personal: "Ambition Soaring Above Apathy and Indolence". "The Kiss of Victory" (1878–81) lyrically exorcizes the pain of his brother's death. "Perseus Arming" (1882) suggest a mortal on the brink of becoming a hero, equipping himself for the trials of life. "Icarus" is the embodiment of self-destructive ambition: "It flashed across me that I was very ambitious; why not 'Icarus' with his desire for flight?" Even the Winchester Jubilee Memorial was to Gilbert intensely personal: that formidably regal figure was modelled on his own mother – "One was Queen of my country – the other Queen of my heart". "Comedy and Tragedy" (1891–2) completes the cycle: gaiety and glamour poisoned by spiritual misery. "The Broken Shrine" (*c*1900) confirms this disintegration of the spirit, caught between Eros and Anteros, ego and id. As for "A Dream of Joy During a Sleep of Sorrow" (the Leeds Chimneypiece, 1908–13), it sums up only too well the morbid confusion into which the sculptor sank at his mother's death in 1909. That, of course, was the period of Gilbert's exile, starving and lonely in Bruges. "Circe" (1912) sums up all the bitterness of that phase: "England be damned". All through, whatever the subject, the work is the man. Gilbert, Dorment rightly concludes, "was almost incapable of producing any work of art which was not ultimately about himself".

No doubt most of those torments were self-inflicted. He was careless, impulsive, extravagant, irresponsible, self-centred, histrionic, sexually driven, maddeningly unbusinesslike. "It is", noted Edward Poynter, "the saddest case of ill-balanced genius that I ever heard of . . . . We have all come to the conclusion that he is hopelessly incorrigible." Even so, Gilbert's fall was cruel. Hounded by creditors and bailiffs; driven into exile; drummed out of the Garrick Club; forced into resignation from the Royal Academy; reduced to such poverty that he even saw his mother buried in a pauper's grave – he re-paid his debts with other forms of interest. And he was unlucky. "Eros" (1886–93) is as much a monument to administrative bungling as it is to the great philanthropist – or to the unhappy sculptor. After that fiasco he was easy prey for money-lenders and art-dealers. He was not – legally speaking – dishonest. Since Dorment's book was published, Dr Cecil Gilbert has pointed out (*The Spectator*, July 13 and August 3, 1985) that, for all his tergiversations, Gilbert kept to the letter of the copyright act of 1814: selling replicas was [illegible]

"St George" (aluminium and ivory, circa 1896) – a detail from Alfred Gilbert's Memorial to the Duke of Clarence in the Albert Memorial Chapel, Windsor. It is one of twelve saints incorporated in the elaborate grille surrounding the sarcophagus, and is reproduced from the book reviewed here.

unaware that duplication was taking place. The real dishonesty lay with those who disposed of replicas without his knowledge. Still – particularly by selling statuettes prepared for the Clarence Memorial – Gilbert sailed far too close to the wind. He could not afford to be a gentleman.

Such matters will continue to make this a contentious book. There are other problems too. Critics who confuse reviewing with proof-reading will no doubt delight in the fact that Edward the Confessor is confused with Edward King and Martyr; that the village of Boldre in Hampshire, is spelt in two different ways, neither of which appears in the index. And so on. But Dorment's decision – understandable in the circumstances – not to document variants and duplicates, nor even to attempt a catalogue of works, means that a number of intriguing byways are hinted at rather than explained. The variant figure of Zeal from the Fawcett Memorial? The Clarence Memorial Virgin presented by Sir D. Y. Cameron to Kippen parish church? Sooner or later, there will have to be a full-scale *catalogue raisonné*. And that will take some doing. During his lifetime, Gilbert's affairs were chaotic. Since his death, squabbles among his family, friends and critics have compounded that chaos by deliberate misrepresentation.

So we are left with an unfinished monument to a very great sculptor. "Icarus" and "Perseus Arming" challenge comparison with Donatello: Rodin placed their creator higher than Cellini. Some would say it was Gilbert's fate to play Cellini to Alfred Stevens's Michelangelo. But he had a way with metal and plaster which was peculiarly his own. The feathered filigree of the Preston Mayoral Chain (1888–92); the heart-rending profile of little Thoby Prinsep (1898); the sad-eyed grace of Mrs Harry Cust (1894); the sheer verve of Paderewski (1891). Oh yes, he was a genius all right. Cellini and Fabergé in one. And [illegible]

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The pattern recurs: Ernst Bloch blazes into friendship, lavishes his intellectual and personal trust on a new acquaintance; an ideological or material difference arises; Bloch and his friend and correspondent break off, more or less acrimoniously; years of private and political torment pass; in the grace of high old age and of a homecoming to recognition, Bloch renews contact; the old quarrels subside into ironic or conciliatory remembrance. So it went with Lukács, Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Horkheimer.

A tumultuous welcome of spirit, a rapture of self-disclosure, characterize Bloch's philosophy and temperament. For a crucial period (1911–14), Georg Lukács is the touchstone, the custodian of Bloch's own intellectual and moral growth. During the early 1930s, Adorno is the elect partner to Bloch's philosophy of music, to his search for a philosophic sociology. Bloch senses in Benjamin the genius for the prophetic, the mastery of symbolic forms which are primary to his own programme. Horkheimer will, surely, prove to be the source of desperately needed financial and academic support during the years of hunted emigration and American exile. Each time, the utopia of elective affinity is flawed. Lukács's systematic Marxism-Leninism is not Bloch's. Adorno not only develops his own, forbiddingly mandarin musicology, but becomes a cultural conservative in the ambience of the Cold War. Benjamin condescends, and conceals what he owes to Bloch's early writing in esoteric twilight. Horkheimer provides polite testimonials but leaves Bloch in near destitution.

The source of these impassioned scenarios of encounter and estrangement is twofold. The horrors of isolation and dispersal visited on European Jews in this century, the premonitory stress and menace of the Weimar years, complicated, dramatized personal relations to a degree difficult to exaggerate. The lives of the German-Jewish intelligentsia, of the Jewish radical dreamers from Central Europe, underwent extreme enervation and emotional pressure long before the catastrophe of 1933. Bloch's three marriages; Benjamin's peregrine experiments in Marxism, narcotics, cabbalistic speculations; Adorno and Horkheimer's almost pathetic pursuit of academic-organizational respectability and hard-edged professionalism – all these are symptoms of justified stress, of apocalyptic intimations and experiences. Like animals before, during and after an earthquake, these formidably gifted, harried spirits quivered, sought shelter, flinched away from one another, in varying intensities of reciprocal need and alarm, of overwhelming emotional investment and corresponding alienation.

But the second reason lies with Ernst Bloch himself. It is too soon to arrive at any confident summation of the seventeen volumes of his works. A great deal of material remains to be fully grasped and situated in the historical and formal context. None the less, Bloch's essential aloneness, the *sui generis* of his style and philosophy, are increasingly evident. He represents what physicists call "a singularity", an idiosyncratic twist in the rule-bound and predictable skein of natural forces. His *docta spes*, his ontology and metaphysics of the future tense, draw powerfully on the messianic substratum and vocabulary of Marxism and of the Marxist irruption out of Hegelian historicity. Bloch's "dreaming forward" – the cardinal act in his counter-systematic open-ended system – takes inspiration from Master Eckhart, from Jakob Böhme, from Novalis and the neo-cabbalists of the German Romantic movement. The dramatized philosophy of music in Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche provides vital hints. But in essence, and in its indissoluble connection with the apocalyptic, mantic, aphoristic prose and prose-poetry of German Expressionism, Bloch's world and work remain singular. There is no other book like the *Geist der Utopie*, his early masterpiece, or the leviathan *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. There is no other cultural reportage and commentary like that of *Spuren*.

Consciously or not, Bloch strove to escape from the apartness of his vision. In a man so omnivorously learned, so prodigal of sensibility, so eloquent, isolation was, as it were, thronged with awareness, even public. In the years following his final move to the West, Bloch became a public institution and cult-figure. But the primary apartness remained. It was not his contemporaries who truly understood, let alone accepted what Bloch was about. The true partner of his tidal monologue, the secret sharer, was Schelling. At numerous points in their actual careers, in the crucial paradox of their respective aloneness within a great intellectual-historical movement (German Idealism on the one hand, Central European-Judaic secular Messianism on the other), in their genius for friendship and quarrel, Schelling and Bloch are close kindred.

To the intellectual historian, to the sociologist and psychologist of the life of the mind, to the student of Marxism and of the Frankfurt School, these first two volumes of Bloch's correspondence between 1903 and 1975 will be invaluable. Many more letters are yet to be published. But already this carefully annotated selection, including as it does numerous letters to Bloch, is certain to deepen and modify the spiritual, intellectual history of modern European aesthetics, Marxism and "meta-Marxism", and emancipated Judaism. Bloch was not a master letter-writer in the sense of, say, Keats or Proust. These *c*600 letters are the direct extension of his urgent mode of speech. The vocative need was usually too great, too raw, to allow for stylistic polish. The notion that many of his letters to Lukács or Adorno or Kracauer had survived destruction by Nazism and war, let alone that they might be published, can have come to Bloch only very late. If so many of these letters are intellectual-historical documents of the first order, it is because the philosophic and the private, the didactic and the intimate were, in Bloch, a unity, a constant. He lived thought as he lived the politics of redemption.

In point of argumentative density, of their emotional undercurrents and of the representative estrangement to which they led, the exchanges with Lukács (a number of which have appeared in print previously) are paramount. Formally, the relationship of the two men extended from 1910 to 1971. But its Arcadian spell lay, as always with Bloch, at the outset. It was in the years immediately preceding the First World War that Lukács was "mein herrlicher Kollege", the essayist, the begetter of a systematic aesthetic and philosophy of executive forms, in whom Bloch recognized an intellect more rigorous, more tenacious, more economic of insight than his own. It is to Lukács, after an Alpine scramble in late August of 1911, that Bloch communicates his programme of vibrant vitalism: "ein körperlicher Auftrieb zum Licht und zu einer ringsum seltsam vibrierenden und zerklüfteten Ewigkeit, den ich stärker als bisher kultivieren will" ("a bodily upsurge towards the light and towards a strangely vibrant and explosive eternity, which I want to nurture more strongly than hitherto"). That superb sentence is a *summa* of Ernst Bloch. It contains the thrust towards the light, the vibrant aura of tensed striving, the fragmentation of his future work, the key notion that ecstasy must be "cultivated", that the pursuit of the utopian is also a *Bildungsroman*.

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Only a few days later, Bloch formulates to Lukács very nearly the entirety of his agenda for life: he will explore the theosophy of the Old Testament, with special reference to the dream of Jacob's Ladder; he will relate biblical allegories of aspiration and prevision to the fundamental (Kantian) categories of the human intellect; God's "homecoming" is to be understood as a universal construct of hope. But all this is to be conceived as "nunc et hic et quid et quale bedingenden, tragenden, begründenden Ideenpyramide!" – an untranslatable Coleridgean wonder of a sentence, in which the transcendent and the immanent, the future and the immediate are fused in an act of ascent (that pyramid to the stars).

But the fatality of difference was present almost from the first rapture. Lukács's ascetic self-control spellbound but also repelled the ardent Bloch. He urges Lukács: "Du sollst Dich auch als Leib fühlen" ("You should be aware of yourself as a body as well"). The seemingly inhuman, analytic calm of Lukács in the face of his closest friend's early death, of the suicide of his first serious love, in May and October 1911, disconcert and chill Ernst Bloch. Money matters intrude. With unembarrassed, though self-mocking, zest, Bloch goes fortune-hunting. A young thinker of manifest genius but few professional prospects requires a dowered wife. Else von Stritzki is not only the right companion for Bloch's soul, but an heiress. A "forward dream" of millions induces marriage, the purchase of fine old furniture, of a scholar's library. The cornucopia does not materialize and Else falls gravely ill (she dies in 1921). Lukács's father is a banker of great wealth and generosity. Lukács's tone when it comes to Bloch's failure to reimburse punctually the loans he has made him, Lukács's strictures on Bloch's somewhat prodigal way of life, grate. It is the oldest tale: ebullient, spendthrift Antony on the one side, "the moralizing solipsist" Augustus on the other. The implicit polemic, however, went far beyond individual temperament.

Bloch's "auroral" Marxism (the cardinal epithet derives from Böhme and Hamann) was formulated in his mind and personal pronouncements as early as 1914. He could, in the summer of 1915, declare to Lukács his confident expectation of the Messiah, that is to say of a profound revolution of ethical-political values and potentialities in the nature of suffering mankind. A letter of September 1916 conjoins the triple theme of Messianic hope, of myth and of music in precisely the ways which were to organize and inspire the whole of Bloch's long life. Lukács's commitment to radicalism and the critique of values was of a severely immanent, even bureaucratic kind. His Hegelian Marxism, though often heterodox, would lead to the Communist Party, to self-criticism in respect of his early and perhaps finest writings, to Moscow. Lukács perceived in Bloch's rapturous "futurism" a more or less insidious betrayal of concrete political-social reality, of needs and strategies *hic et nunc*. For Bloch – he reiterates this paradox over and over – the dignity of a utopia consists precisely in its current unrealizability; the truth of a dream is demonstrated by the very fact that it may not be fulfilled. These axioms struck Lukács as fundamentally frivolous; they belonged to that which he detested most – the bohemia of thought and of politics. They were not "radical" in Marx's pragmatic sense, but an "uprooting".

Bloch laboured for a renewal of mutual understanding after he went to Leipzig in 1949. There is a rare pathos in his letter to Lukács of June 11, 1955. Whatever their differences and the intervening decades of silence, "we are seen together as those who have made visible to intelligence, who have made most clearly perceptible, the true level and perspectives, the wealth of understanding and the humanity in Marxism". A certain cordiality was restored. But the attempt at a genuine exchange of views, during a radio round-table in 1967, proved hollow. Lukács's judgment is trenchant: "man muss heute nur den *Geist der Utopie* oder den *Thomas Münzer* von Bloch neben mein *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* stellen, um zu sehen, dass damals schon eine vollkommene Scheidung der Wege da war. . . ." ("Today you just have to compare Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* or *Thomas Münzer* with my *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* to see how far apart we were even then"). Lukács would have concurred wholeheartedly with Kracauer's acute readings of Bloch's eschatology in letters of 1932 and of 1965. Bloch's dialectic of annunciation and awaiting is grounded neither in Marxist theory nor praxis. Marxism is an impersonal methodology: "Deine Philosophie ist kein System, das losgelöst von Dir existierte." Panoptic, encyclopaedic, oceanic though it be, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (a complete translation into English is, heroically, imminent from Blackwell's) remains a monumental memoir, the pilgrimage through history, philosophy and the arts of a dramatis persona. Bloch's teachings are, today, the inspiration of theologians and secular cabbalists, of dwellers in metaphor, not of toilers in the vineyards of the Party.

Nevertheless, the motives for Bloch's move to the German Democratric Republic were solid and empirically considered. This is made plain in the voluminous correspondence with Joachim Schumacher, a Swiss intellectual and intimate in whom Bloch confided from 1933 to 1958. (As there was, in this case, no element of creative parity and potential rivalry, intimacy and mutual confidence persisted.) It was not only that the invitation by the university of Leipzig meant the long-dreamt-of professorial chair, the incorporation into the proud respectability of the academy. It was not only the ache for the temporal resonance, for the concentrated historicity of Europe, which induced Bloch to leave the refuge of the United States (materially a bittter refuge, and one in which he had failed to learn the language). It was a vivid belief in the importance of the socialist-materialist experiment. Bloch knew that National Socialism and the German disaster had subterranean, parodistic but also authentic continuities with the philosophic achievements and crises of German Idealism. He intuited that the future of Western metaphysical and social thought was indivisible from the tragic destiny of German culture. Marxism itself had arisen from the world of Kant and Hegel, from Schelling's erratic but inspired quest for a *ratio* of human emancipation, for a metaphysic of freedom. Bloch was no innocent as to the realities of Soviet practice. But he intimated that American pluralism, American mass-mercantilism, paradoxically combined with a fundamentalist and primitive sense of "world-mission", constituted a greater threat to the intellect and the creation of great art and music than did Soviet obscurantism and oppression. He knew, like Borges, that censorship is the mother of metaphor, that it is *against* a state-system that one dreams most productively. Where anything can be said, is said, nothing matters finally. Whatever could be said, written, taught in Leipzig mattered intensely. The true cleric, the true poet and the KGB agree that a lecture on Hegel or a Mandelstam epigram are the most implosive, the most consequential of human acts. Bloch to Schumacher on September 8, 1958 (when conditions in the GDR were already menacing): "Nur im Osten, nicht ohne ihm, wird die Rettung des Sozialismus gegebenenfalls gewinnbar sein; ein 20. Parteitag wird kaum der letzte sein und nicht mehr so zurücknehmbar. Hier hat mein philosophisches Werk seinen historischen Platz, eine Flamme und ein reisiger Stein des Anstosses, nicht eine interessante Salonmeinung unter anderen im Westen" ("Only in the East, not without it, will the concrete salvation of socialism be capable of being won; a XXth Party Congress will hardly be the last and will not be readily rescinded. It is here that my philosophic work has its historical impact; not an interesting drawing-room opinion among others as in the West.") The spark needs the opposing stone; it is lit by impact.

Once again, the hope faded. Abroad, as it chanced, at the moment of the erection of the Berlin Wall, Bloch elected not to return (his books and manuscripts had to be smuggled to the West). He was to spend the last and crowning years of his patriarchal life at Tübingen. But as Bloch himself had taught, no hope is worth espousing, no dream worth "dreaming forward", if there is not implicit in them the chance of negation. How else could there be the *experimentum mundi*, the miracle at morning of a new start?

Music is both the realization and the proof of this inception. Bloch's eschatology is at its most original and seductive in its philosophic and allegoric uses of music. The fact of music, the psychosomatic nature of our musical experience, the universality of musical imagining and performance throughout all cultures, demonstrate man's need for, man's capacity to construe and apprehend, dynamic meanings, feelings, intellectual configurations beyond rational paraphrase. Music moves in and generates units of temporality related to, but also distinct from common linear time. It is the radical genius of music, of the unfolding energies of compositional motion, to articulate, to exemplify, to communicate "coming-into-being", to deploy the future out of present form and material. Here, as so often, the combinatorial play of German etymologies and word-formations provides seminal help. *Das Unerhörte* is, at one literal level, the "unheard"; at another, it is the "unprecedented", the "wondrous", the surprisingly "enormous" in a sense potentially either positive or negative. To enter music is, for Bloch, "ein Aufenthalt im Unerhörten", a sojourn in the palpable mystery of the open-ended. Music, proclaims an essay of 1939, is the pre-eminent *Rettungswerk*, or "saving, salvational work":

> Musik ist das Experiment der Herausführung des Menschen in eine ihm so eigene Welt, dass sie nicht mehr, wie die der übrigen Künste, in das bisher gewordene Dasein eingebaut ist. Aber diese Welt, und das macht das Legitime des musikalischen Geheimnisses aus, ist auch kein Himmelsbild eines Jenseits. . . . Musik, zuhöchst verweilen-könnende, ist statt dessen ein Ausdruck in der immanentesten Nähe; ihr Symbolisches aber zeigt nichts nur für die Rezeptivität Gärendes, sondern es zeigt, wie in keiner anderen Kunst, dass das symbolische hier Bedeutete *sich selbst noch verhüllt und unfertig, fölglich ein Realsymbol ist*. Die Beethoven-Welt hat so Empörung in sich, aber auch Kampf und Ruf über die Tagesgrenzen der Gewordenheit hinaus. Die himmlisch empfindbare Ruhe des essentiellen Adagio kann nur eine utopische sein; Musik ist die Zentralkunst des utopischen Bewusstseins.

> Music is the experiment of man's exodus to a world so much his own that, unlike the other arts, it is not built into previous structures of being. But this world – hence the legitimacy of the secret of music – is no celestial image of a beyond . . . . On the contrary, music, with its highest capacity for present lastingness, is a manifestation in the most immanent proximity. Its symbolism is representative not for what is only expectant and seminal. Like no other art, music signifies that the manifest symbol *is still concealed to itself and unfinished, which means that it is a reality-symbol*. Thus the Beethoven-world contains rebellious outrage, but also a struggle and summons beyond the daily frontiers of the extant. The heavenly-felt calm of the essential adagio can only be a utopian one; music is the central art of utopian consciousness.

This tremendous passage, with its veiled but talismanic allusion to the apotheosis in *Faust II* (perennially for Bloch the text of texts), does not appear in the selection of *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*. But containing as it does the major chapter on music and Utopia from the *Geist der Utopie*, the 1925 essay on the dialectical and mathematical character of musical creation and reception, together with the famous musical "movement" in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, this anthology and its translation into English are an event. Peter Palmer's version represents a taxing encounter with the sybilline eloquence of the original. It reads persuasively. David Drew's ample preface, though it manages the *salto mortale* of not mentioning that all the main figures it deals with are Jews and that the meaning of their symbiotic and polemic interactions is rooted in the destiny of modern assimilated Judaism, is of the greatest interest and incisiveness. It connects Bloch's musical thought to that of Busoni and Klemperer. It evokes the collaboration with Hanns Eisler and the ambiguous fascination with Kurt Weill. Drew is surely right in seeing in Bloch's teleology of music an extreme development of Schopenhauer's belief that a true philosophy of music would be a true philosophy. He has fascinating addenda on Bloch's influence on certain musicians of today, Goehr vividly among them. What would need further emphasis is Bloch's indebtedness to the music-mysticism, to the Pythagorean-Boethian numerology and music-cosmology of the Middle Ages and the Baroque (material put to use in Mann's *Doktor Faustus*).

Mann's musicology and portrayal of the Evil One derive largely from the work and person of Adorno. In Bloch's philosophy of music, the relationship with Adorno, which extended through [illegible] from 1928 to 1968, is crucial. Adorno was a musicologist, critic and composer of professional training and authority. His analytic knowledge of classical and contemporary scores greatly exceeded that of Bloch's compelling but eclectic intuition. At the outset, however, the exchanges between the two thinkers on music were fruitful. The surviving letters (they are not many) suggest something of the stimulus and intensity of the mutual discussions on Berg, on the phenomenology of music after Husserl, on Adorno's early compositions. Soon, however, antinomies emerged. Adorno's technicality and the would-be scientific tenor of his sociology of music left Bloch unconvinced. In turn, Bloch's music-Messianism repelled Adorno. The coming of the night in 1933, the world after Auschwitz, proved to Adorno that Bloch's utopian readings of musical invention were spurious. Even *Fidelio*, Bloch's archetype, could no longer be cited as a human ascent to freedom. To Adorno, Wagner is the expression of the spells of twilight and dissolution. Bloch's view of Wagner is critical; but he insists that love and an "open" intimation of innocence are born of the dark, particularly in *Parsifal*. If the leitmotifs in the *Ring* often echo back to a tenebrous past, they are also dynamic with anticipation. It is as if the very impetus of death in Wagner entailed resurrection. Moreover, despite these deep disagreements, Adorno's music-philosophy, his despairing verdicts on the defeat of hope by barbarism, are charged with Bloch's presence. Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* is virtually an epilogue to the *Geist der Utopie*, a tragic epilogue to a great satyr-play.

The crowded humanity of these two volumes of letters, the publication in English of high points from Bloch's *harmonia mundi* (Kepler was never far off), the forthcoming availability in English of the *magnum opus*, should have their impact. The directions of study and reflection which they suggest are almost too numerous. Where is the milieu of spirit and being in which a Bloch, a Benjamin, a Kracauer, an Adorno could meet, argue, hammer out their respective needs of humane understanding (as they did, for example, in the winter of 1928)? It died in the ashes of European Judaism. That which Nazism and Stalinism perverted and destroyed remains a permanent lesion in the vital resources of human dignity and potential progress. A fearful waste and laying waste shadows these letters.

Ernst Bloch would bridle at any such coda. Almost blind, the ninety-year-old public man maintained an awesome *élan vital* (I know, having tried to act as translator for him at the torrential monologue-seminar he gave on his one visit to an astonished Oxford). It was not death he envisaged in Arcadia, though he knew its presence, but a chance to garden. This, perhaps, was his primordial link with the absolute of survival in Judaism ("Mein Mann und Bruder im philosophischen Leben war allezeit Spinoza, nicht Hegel"). More exactly: Bloch's religion is that of the second-century Montanists, of the scattered followers of the condemned Montanus, who waited for a third revolution in matter and soul after Sinai and after Christ's Easter. This was to be the revolution of the Holy Ghost, of the translation of all presentness into the peace and truth of the future tense. Like Rabelais, with a far more positive, trusting stress, Bloch looked to death as "le grand peut-être". The good that *may* be *can* be. Why else should it illumine our dreams?

These are high matters, on the uncertain verge of the occult. Implicitly they mock, but are also vulnerable to, the abstemious formalities, the clear vinegar of what has, until very lately, passed for respectable philosophy in the Anglo-American dispensation. The arcane is not, however, the sole note in Bloch's register. A robust, earthy immediacy and laughter quickened his meditations and arts of survival. "Banality is counter-revolution", declared Isaac Babel. Bloch rejoiced in that definition. By its sharp light he remained, to the end, a revolutionary. There were ugly moments in his long voyage: most notoriously, the attempted apologia for the Moscow purge trials. But compared to the compromises made by Brecht and Lukács, these were, of the briefest. Fundamentally, Ernst Bloch's rebellions in hope had one unalterable meaning: they said No to the inhuman.

Looking into the depths

Michael Tanner

BERNDT W. WESSLING
Furtwängler: Eine kritische Biographie
480pp. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. DM68.
3421 06248 X

Given the immense amount of controversy that Furtwängler's name has aroused during at least the past sixty years, there are remarkably few books about him, and on the whole their quality has been deplorable. The first biography appeared in 1941 in Germany, and was a predictable piece of Nazi hagiography, complete with an opening chapter on "Das Blut", demonstrating the impeccably Aryan origins of its subject; and including a useful list of the works which Furtwängler had performed up to that date with the Berlin Philharmonic, and the number of times he had performed them – but omitting, naturally, his performances of Mendelssohn, Mahler or Schoenberg. In 1950 a second edition appeared, with equally predictable revisions, but still couched in the vapid terms of adulatory record-sleeve writing, which is in any case its author's first vocation. In 1953, a year before Furtwängler's death, Curt Riess's sketchy biography, the only one translated into English, appeared. It was written with the co-operation of Furtwängler, and was largely concerned to exonerate him from the charges which were still being repeated – and it seems that they will never stop – that he was a Nazi stooge. Since then, apart from Elisabeth Furtwängler's moving and informative but brief volume of reminiscences of her husband, which was published in 1979, there has been no book on his life and work in general, though in 1955 Atlantis Verlag published *Furtwängler im Urteil seiner Zeit*, a collection of tributes and essays on various aspects of his career, which remains the most useful single volume on him, and which is heavily mined by Berndt W. Wessling in his new "critical biography".

No doubt one reason why so little is written about him in contrast to Toscanini – and Furtwängler is always in contrast to Toscanini – is that to write about him at all is to tread on treacherous ground. Toscanini's life has all the straightforwardness of a moral tale, displaying hard work and selfless dedication to the highest standards of orchestral execution, combined with intransigent hostility to fascism, leading to unprecedented fame and adoration. Italians are proud of his humble Parmesan origins, and Americans can point to him as the ideal success story. He was a simple man, famously insisting that the first movement of the *Eroica* is simply allegro con brio, and unrelated to any extramusical meanings or phenomena (this insistence itself being peddled by his fanatical admirers as a moral quality); someone whom to admire reflects in the most favourable way on his admirers. Books about Toscanini tend to be soggy with self-righteousness. Hans Keller, who has made more intelligent contributions to this whole area than anyone else, has called him the first living gramophone record; as such, he is ideally suited to a positivistic age which knows what objectivity is, and where it is to be found. Furtwängler, by contrast, appears to be as German as Wagner – whom he conducted with unique authority and intensity – and to suffer from many, though not all, of Wagner's moral ambiguities, to phrase it no more strongly. While Toscanini saw the literal rendering of a score as a moral obligation to its composer, Furtwängler was always intent on going behind the notes, eliciting from them a metaphysical and spiritual significance which aligns him with the great German Romantics, and he thus belongs to a tradition which, inveterately searching for depth, none the less turned out to be readily transmutable into the shallowest, most evil world-view ever to be devised by a subliterate gang of thugs. Furthermore, Furtwängler lived through the hell which they perpetrated, was frequently fêted as one of its greatest cultural heroes, and emerged protesting his innocence to an incredulous world; incredulous then, sceptical ever since.

Now, just as the centenary of his birth is about to be celebrated, Wessling has produced [illegible] wholly absorbing book, though its contents make it perhaps more opportunistic than opportune. For more than twenty years Wessling has been producing books at a rate which would be astonishing if they were of any substance. They include biographies of several of the great post-war Wagnerian singers, and of Lotte Lehmann and Rudolf Bockelmann, whose diaries are drawn on extensively in the present volume (a lengthy excerpt from them on pages 158–160 is the best account of Furtwängler's conducting that I have ever read). These books are chatty, gossipy, relying heavily on oral testimony, and sketchily authenticated. At least one of them – *Toscanini in Bayreuth* – calls Wessling's work into serious question. Harvey Sachs, in his *Toscanini*, by far the most balanced and useful biography of the conductor – described it thus: "There are references to interviews which never took place, letters which were never written, untraceable verbal quotations, non-existent passages in books and many other inexplicable items", and he proceeds to document these charges. This puts the reader of the present book in a difficult position, for it too contains a good deal of reporting which, at least to the non-specialist reader, is uncheckable, and on which a great deal hangs. In something that Wessling clearly regards as central to an estimate of Furtwängler's character – his attitude towards, and treatment of, Herbert von Karajan – it is essential that the material should be faultlessly accurate and as complete as possible.

Wessling sees Furtwängler as pathologically fearful of rivals, despite his manifest respect for and friendship with Klemperer and Bruno Walter. Though his initial hostility towards Karajan was the result of the notorious review written by Edwin van der Nüll in 1938 and headed "Das Wunder Karajan", it could well be the case that Karajan's aims in conducting were what primarily horrified him; indeed, for anyone who listens to a recording of the same work by the two conductors, it would have been astonishing if they could bear one another. Karajan's professed admiration for Furtwängler must either be insincere or uncomprehending, since the kind of beauty (in a highly specific sense) that he has spent his life pursuing is antithetical to the truths which Furtwängler searched for throughout his career. In the analogous case of his distaste for Toscanini, there is the crucial piece "Toscanini in Deutschland", which Furtwängler wrote in 1930 after Toscanini's triumphant appearances in Berlin, and which has appeared in abbreviated form in his *Aufzeichnungen* (published in 1980), from which it is clear, from his detailed analyses of individual performances by Toscanini, that his hostility was to the latter's view of music; he goes out of his way to say that Toscanini possessed "greatness of character".

Furtwängler's relationship to the Nazis remains a highly complex issue, and it is to Wessling's credit that he doesn't attempt to simplify it. The most painful feature of it is that Furtwängler himself thought it could be and remain simple: that, by staying in Germany during the Third Reich (whose life-expectancy he drastically underestimated) and performing the great works of the German tradition, he was effectively refuting the Nazis's claim to be the true inheritors of that tradition. In a sense he was; but the trouble is that music can speak with one voice and be heard as saying something quite other. The Nazi bigwigs were even able to sit in the front row while he gave shattering performances of Beethoven's setting of "Alle Menschen werden Brüder". And Wagner's Wahn-Monolog, the greatest of all artistic indictments of the folly and fruitlessness of violence, could be movingly performed by Bockelmann, himself a fervent Nazi, at the Nuremberg rally of 1938, with Furtwängler conducting! That performance can be heard on a pirate recording, highlights from it having been recorded for Hitler's private pleasure. It is overwhelming. But how can Furtwängler have thought that it would have the desired effect? Can he really have been so naive? At the same time, his outspoken remarks against the régime, which became ever more recklessly severe, were tolerated only because he did stand for civilized values in a way that the Nazis desperately needed someone to do, even while they earned him sufficient hostility for him to end up on the Gestapo's extermination list; he made a very narrow escape to Switzerland in February 1945. None the less, it is amazing that he was shocked by the antagonism of many émigrés towards him after the war, though there is a further complication in the story, since the Toscanini-led faction which kept him out of the United States was animated by motives that were political in more than one sense. And if Furtwängler's defence of playing Beethoven in the Third Reich was simple-minded, Thomas Mann's claim that he should only be performed in liberal democracies was no less so, and was compounded by a shocking smugness (and warmth towards the leaders of East Germany) that Wessling fails to mention. The relevant documents can be found in Daniel Gillis's invaluable *Furtwängler in America*. I conclude, hesitantly, that the person who suffered most as a result of remaining in Germany was Furtwängler himself.

It is a pity that one still has to spend so much time defending Furtwängler on other than purely musical matters, but inevitable, given his own extreme anti-aestheticism. What is really important now, given his supreme stature, is a full-length biography of him such as Peter Heyworth is according Klemperer; and, what would be even more valuable, an analytical study of his recordings of the major works in his repertoire. I remember hearing several years ago on the BBC's *Music Weekly* an item in which parts of Wagner's essay on the correct way of performing the Overture to *Die Meistersinger* were read out, interspersed with the relevant sections of a recording which demonstrated to perfection what Wagner's intentions were. It was no surprise to learn at the end of the talk that the conductor was Furtwängler. And in general Furtwängler's mode of conducting suggests that at an early age he studied Wagner's superb short book *On Conducting*, and incorporated it into his musical being. The advice Wagner gives on performing the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth (his own performances of it were legendary), especially what he says about phrasing and tempo, would appear to be precisely what Furtwängler is following in the many live performances of it that have fortunately survived, except that, as always, he doesn't seem to be following anything. One can only come back to what his admirers always stress: the sense of improvisatory freedom combined with a feeling of total inevitability, so that there is always a movement between re-creation and new creation. It is manifest in a particularly controversial, but to me wholly convincing way in his performance of the cadenza of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto (on a Steinway grand). And thanks to his extraordinary grasp of the whole of any work, including the *Ring*, he is able to linger or point up specific details without any impression of the work's design having been interfered with. He was always insistent that in any musical movement there was one supreme climax, and because he infallibly manages to convey where and what that is, the rest falls into place, and above all the line (what Wagner called the "melos") is never threatened. No wonder that Callas expressed regret at the end of her life that she had never had the chance to sing with him. Wholly different though their repertoires were, their approach to music and the selfless fanaticism with which they sought out its truths were remarkably similar.

Apart from the study of his performances, what further is needed is a translation of his many essays, addresses and notebooks, which include some of the best writing on music there is – for example, the great essay "Der Fall Wagner, frei nach Nietzsche", of which Wessling gives a scandalously shoddy and inaccurate account; performances of his finest compositions, especially the Second and Third Symphonies, and the Symphonic Concerto for Piano and Orchestra; and of course, and above all, the issuing of as many performances as possible from the radio archives and elsewhere, and their retention in the catalogue whatever their sales. In these brutally depressing times, he is more indispensable than ever; while he was alive, there were other conductors who could be compared with him, even if they came off second best. Now there is none. Without him, we would lose our sense of what musical greatness is, and why it matters.

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PHILIPPE ARIÈS

Translated by Janet Lloyd

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Fixed and free

Robert Wells

R. GEORGE THOMAS
Edward Thomas: A portrait
331pp. Oxford Clarendon Press. £12.95.
0198185278

R. George Thomas is Edward Thomas's devoted scholar. This biography follows on his edition of the *Collected Poems* and, like it, is the product of painstaking research. Professor Thomas covers the ground with something of the doggedness which he observes in his namesake, drawing on a mass of previously unavailable material from the papers of Helen Thomas, to present the life in authoritative and intimate detail. The book takes its place as the standard work; yet in some important ways it does not do justice to its subject.

Professor Thomas arranges his material well to compose a scene. The early chapters – Thomas's boyhood in South London, his courtship, his student years at Oxford – are the most successful, though it is almost incidental to their interest that they are about Thomas. They give a fascinating portrait of a late-Victorian emigrant Welsh household, lower middle-class, intent on education, energetic and various in its culture. The story of the courtship contains a certain amount of comedy, though it is told without the ghost of a smile. Shelley's poems were studied. Greek statues were examined in the London galleries. The letters which Helen and Edward exchanged are so high-minded that one has to translate. Occasionally other accents intrude, Edward picking irritably at Helen ("By the way, do you drink wine when I am not here? I would much rather you did not") or fretting about money. Helen was to put up with much more of this during their marriage. Also good are the chapters describing Thomas's life in the army and his final days in France.

Thomas emerges from this account as a man of masks, unexpectedly protean. Edward Thomas, essayist and critic, is also Private P.E. Thomas 4229; while the poems are by Edward Eastaway, a fiction maintained until the secret was given away after Thomas's death by his father. This sense of a floating identity is apparent in the photographs. Here is Thomas as an elegant disciple of Pater, with pipe and blazer, dandling his son on his knee; as a member of Lincoln College boat club, a saturnine-looking hearty; as a tweedy scholar gipsy, haunted and indecisive; as a martinet of a Second Lieutenant during embarkation leave. None of these pictures appears to be of the same person. The phrase "fixed and free", which Professor Thomas picks out of the poem "Words", fits many aspects of Thomas's life and character. One minor but persistent theme is his interest in "mysticism and mental science". We are reminded that he is as much a poet of dream and symbol (he was a champion of Yeats) as he is the rural realist who declares in "The Chalk-Pit" that he "should prefer the truth or nothing".

John Armstrong's "Dreaming Head", 1938, tempera; taken from A Love Affair with Nature: A personal view of British Art *by Edwin Mullins (160pp. Phaidon. £14.95. 0714824046).*

Until he began to write poetry Thomas was tormented, often to the point of breakdown, by the feeling that he was a stranger to himself for want of the right means of expression. Professor Thomas is a clumsy writer, and he comes to grief when he leaves the surface of his story and attempts to analyse this predicament. His insights often get lost in the muddiness of his style. An example of this failure occurs in his description of the friendship between Thomas and Robert Frost (whom he tends to refer to as "the American"). Frost spoke of Thomas as a brother ("I hadn't a plan for the future that didn't include him"). Thomas too was able to shed his self-consciousness and reserve with Frost, as with no other friend; only Helen was closer. What was the nature of this "friendship at first sight"? Professor Thomas hardly acknowledges that it is a matter to be puzzled over. And there is something grudging in his intermittent chipping away at the credit which must go to Frost for turning Thomas to poetry. It makes no difference that Thomas had often been told he was "a poet". Frost suggested precisely what he should do and provided an example in his own work. The vital insight was, as always, the technical one.

There is a strain of sentimental insularity in the cult which has grown up around Thomas. It has to be admitted that the strain is there in his own work. When he writes of his character Lob, "He is English as this gate, these flowers, this mire", the affection is tinged with complacency. Thomas has little sense of a common European culture, or of the common tragedy in which Europe was caught during the First World War. He hated jingoism, yet he took pride in the almost equally unreflecting nature of his own quieter and more tragic patriotism. In his poem, "This is no petty case of right or wrong", the two attitudes become indistinguishable. He is truer to himself in those poems where the land remains unnamed, the dream-country of folk-tale which the traveller chances on, leaves to say a final goodbye to his own people, and can never find his way back to.

On his walks Thomas preferred to follow "an uncertain road" and to go without maps. He knew himself to be someone who learnt by growth, not by an effort of will, and he observed scornfully about "the reading classes", "their ideas are in advance of their experience, their vocabulary in advance of their ideas". He disliked causes and dogmas, and his denigration of his own intellectual abilities is in fact a kind of boast. The theme of not being able to think, of not understanding, is a common one in his work. It is perhaps connected with the strong Puritan element in his nature, implanted by a Nonconformist upbringing. His remark in the last pages of his war diary, "I never understood quite what was meant by God", is close to Cowper's "God moves in a mysterious way"; and his sense of mystery, like Cowper's, was intensified by the inexplicable visitations of depressive illness. In his life as in his writing, Thomas's method was to feel his way forward and to be certain of his destination only when he had touched it: "I neither expected anything / Nor yet remembered: but some goal / I touched then . . .".

It is impossible not to be moved as one follows Thomas from his decision to enlist, in mid-1915, to his death in the Arras offensive nearly two years later. At every stage he chose the course which exposed him to greater danger, leaving a safe job as a map-reading instructor in England, and then a posting behind the front line, to be killed at a forward observation post. A similar progression, as well as the same "power to come to the extreme decision" (this was how he spoke of enlistment) can be found in his literary development. This biography reveals how, almost from the beginning of his career, Thomas struggled to shed the mannerism which, he complained, came naturally to him and to arrive at "living and social words". The need, he came to realize, was to find a poetic technique for reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the individual voice, in the absence of any shared belief. He wanted "an increasing fineness, an increasing subtlety of aim, a deepening of the palimpsest . . . so that more and more the writing reflects not merely the main features of a man's character". He maintained a metrical structure in his verse; his innovation lay in the extent to which he allowed a personal speech rhythm to disrupt it. The poetry of "personality" which he foresaw now provides the convention in which we swim. R. George Thomas's account of this twenty-year struggle, with its slender aftermath of memorable poems, prompts the reflection that this convention may prove equally hard to escape from, as, in its turn, it degenerates into a literary mannerism.

Sharp and sure

Neil Corcoran

DESMOND GRAHAM (Editor)
Keith Douglas: A prose miscellany
159pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £8.95.
0856355267
LINDA M. SHIRES
British Poetry of the Second World War
174pp. Macmillan. £25.
0333369491

In *Keith Douglas: A prose miscellany*, Desmond Graham, Douglas's biographer and editor, has produced a collection of fugitive Douglas pieces of varying quality and interest, from an untitled autobiographical story probably written in 1932, when he was twelve, to a letter written on May 28, 1944, a few days before his death.

Among the most interesting of the juvenilia, some of which were, literally, retrieved from the waste-paper baskets of Christ's Hospital, is the first story itself. Responding to Douglas's discovery that his mother suffered from sleeping sickness, it reveals something of the almost masochistic relentlessness of his nature, the prickly, angular edginess – relieved by sudden moments of erotic tenderness and sympathy – which he seems to have developed as a way of coping with early psychic damage. This surfaces very early on, in literary terms, as a slightly vain and studied critical laboriousness about his own work: the poem "Strange Gardener" of 1936, comes – out of a school exercise book – complete with its "explanation", an account of its allusions and prosody intended "to show that although the main idea of the poem was spontaneous . . . the scheme behind it is lengthily and carefully thought out". The earnestness of this may be usual enough in a gifted literary adolescent, but it persists throughout this volume and sets its tone: decided, sharp, sure of itself.

Inevitably, however, it is the later pieces which prove more compelling, and which justify the book. Graham tells us that he has gathered "all that survives of both sides of Douglas's literary correspondence" – with Blunden, Eliot, J. C. Hall and Tambimuttu. This does not amount to a great deal, but it does have one interesting story to tell, and it supplies some useful interpretative material. The story is that of Eliot's dealings with Douglas. As they are recounted in the correspondence here, they seem to me not to merit Graham's dismissive epithet "unhelpful" in his introduction. Although it is easy to see how Douglas could have regarded Eliot's obliquities as "an excessively polite refusal to have anything to do with my efforts", his letters in fact seem sensible, decent and, at one point, straightforwardly encouraging: of one batch of poems he says, "They seem to me extremely promising, and I should like to keep in touch with you." The real surprise, I think, is that Blunden, in recommending Douglas to Eliot, did not do so more forcefully or persuasively: his initial letter is a prize instance of donnish reticence.

The correspondence with Hall, especially the indispensable letter of August 10, 1943, gives us the benefit of some of Douglas's most mature and considered critical self-evaluations. His defence of his own work, against Hall's opposition, as "réportage and extrospective (if the word exists) poetry", and his hope that he might learn to cross the "cynic and lyric", should be read in conjunction with the essay "Poets in This War", which is made handily available here (following previous publication in the *TLS* in 1971). His anxiety in the essay about the "tautology" of any war poetry after that of the First World War, together with his teeth-gritted stoic ironies ("It seems there were no poets at Dunkirk; or if there were, they stayed there"), make plain the heroic effort behind his own best poems.

This energetic effort, which may properly be described as a form of courage, is apparent also in some striking, and horrifying, short stories, particularly "Death of a Horse", which has an Orwellian clarity and vigour in its depiction of a vertiginous reaction to violence; in an abandoned draft revising part of *Alamein to Zem Zem* which indicates that Stephen Crane was much on Douglas's mind while he was writing it; and in an extremely interesting early draft of "Vergissmeinicht" which suggests the creative, and critical, labour Douglas was capable of, even in the most trying of circumstances, in the perfecting of his art. Desmond Graham, who has done so much to ensure the survival of Douglas's reputation, has given us in this volume what the schoolboy Douglas himself recommended when getting to know a poet you admire: the opportunity to discover "the back of his mind".

Douglas is the only poet to be given a chapter to himself in Linda M. Shires's *British Poetry of the Second World War*. In this respect, as in some others, the book fails to live up to the corrective and revisionist promise of its preface. Its title too is something of a problem: it turns out to mean not only the "war poetry" of the Second World War, but also the other British poetry, or some of it, written between 1939 and 1945. Shires nowhere argues, however, that this work had any coherence other than historical; indeed, she is at pains to divorce the best of the war poetry from the poetry of the Apocalyptics. This is not really a very difficult task, and the book is forced into it only by Shires's literal-minded over-emphasis on the Movement's hostility to the Apocalyptics and neglect of the war poets, particularly Lewis, Keyes and Douglas. The book's thesis, as a result, seems very unfocused, and it is best read as a literary-historical survey of the period.

As such, it yields some useful information from the little magazines and Forces publications of the time and one or two arresting contextual insights: for instance, that the "phoney war" of 1939–40 "stunned the imagination instead of liberating it".

Despite the exemplary dutifulness of the book's research, however, its readings of individual poems are not always very sensitive. I wonder whether the account of Dylan Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn" would survive a greater engagement with the ambiguities of "Robed in the long friends" – increased, no doubt, but possibly horribly diminished too, if "friend" is a euphemism for "worms"; or whether the sentences on F. T. Prince's "Soldiers Bathing" would not have profited from some reference to the context Paul Fussell establishes for that poem in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, a book which does appear in Shires's bibliography. And to enquire, as Shires does, of the Turl Street encounter between Keyes and Philip Larkin, "Were the two men even dimly aware of the symbolic opposition they were later made to enact?", seems altogether too portentous a tone for the meeting Larkin himself has described with such wry knowingness in his introduction to *The North Ship*: "He stopped, so I suppose we must have known each other to talk to – that is, if we had had anything to say. As far as I remember, we hadn't."

LE SEUIL HAS PUT ITS IMPRINT ON HALF A CENTURY

PH. ARIES
R. BARTHES
G. BATESON
H. BAZIN
A. BEGUIN
H. BOLL
B. BREYTENBACH
I. CALVINO
DOM H. CAMARA
J. CAYROL, A. CESAIRE
N. CHOMSKY
F. DE CLOSETS
J.M. COETZEE
F. DOLTO, G. DUBY
T.S. ELIOT, C.E. GADDA
J.K. GALBRAITH
G. GARCIA MARQUEZ
M. GENEVOIX, G. GRASS

J. GREEN
J. IRVING
V. JANKELEVITCH
J. KRISTEVA
J. LACAN
J. LACOUTURE
F. LEBOYER
M. & O. MANNONI
J. MONOD
E. MOUNIER, R. MUSIL
H. REEVES
R.M. RILKE
J. ROTH, E. SABATO
A. & S. SCHWARZ-BART
L.S. SENGHOR
A. SOLJENITSYNE
P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN
P. VEYNE, E. WIESEL

Nostalgic cratylism

John Sturrock

MICHEL LEIRIS
Langage tangage: ou Ce que les mots me disent
189pp. Paris: Gallimard. 69fr.
2070704424

Michel Leiris has lived to be eighty-four: which is an ambiguous good for someone who so dreads extinction. Extinction has not come, but he has had all the longer to look disablingly ahead to it. His cowardice, of which the fear of death is only part, has been the abject motif of his writing for half a century; it has stopped him living as he would have liked to live, heroically, or putting his buoyantly leftist politics into any sort of practice. Leiris has lived as the *bourgeois malgré lui*. But the wish that we should all know what a coward he is has kept him writing, through several extraordinary, self-punishing volumes of autobiography. *Langage tangage* is a coda to those volumes.

It may, as he knows, be Leiris's last book, because any day now death, the grand literary topos, must revert to being an extinguishing fact. Leiris's fear of it remains, even if he senses that at eighty-four he cannot reasonably complain of running out of time. At this bad moment, however, he asks whether he should finally admit defeat, and give up writing. Writing has been all his life his hiding-place and his saving distraction; should he now undo all he has done in the literary way and actually burn his books? This is to be self-defeating as only Leiris knows how. But melodrama of that tall order no longer persuades him as it used to: he will not burn his books because he likes them, and how, in any case, could he destroy the copies of them on other people's bookshelves?

Leiris needs to write because he has made writing his living; and he may yet write more books. *Langage tangage* is a test of his powers; he wanted to find out: was his brain still up to it? A reader and habitual admirer of Leiris's work's answer is: yes, the intelligence and the idiosyncrasy are still there. The prose in this volume is wearier and often blander than in the intense and elaborate pages of *La Règle du jeu*, and the subjects which Leiris writes about are the familiar ones. But if it does not add much to his earlier books, *Langage tangage* adds something, and is a coda worth having.

The first seventy pages are a second instalment of Leiris's pre-war *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses*. The title this time is "Souple mantique et simples tics de glotte", and then, below, in explanation of this riddling line, "en supplément". The two titles themselves show what Leiris is up to, which is writing his own peculiar "definitions" for certain terms of the common language. But perhaps "writing" is too strong a word, and "finding" would be better; because the "definitions" are derived by playing around with the phonemes of the term in question, squeezing "j'y serre mes gloses" out of "Glossaire" and "souple mantique et simples tics" out of "supplément" (the "glotte" I take it is an echo of the earlier title). Leiris works from sound to sense, and when things go right contrives to relate the term to his own views and characteristics. *As good examples from this new "glossary" I give:* "HAMLET dont l'âme halète"; or "RUMINER – me ramoner". These stand out because they are succinct and take few liberties with the phonetics. They are also apt: who is Leiris if not an anxiously self-dramatizing Hamlet, and what are his literary ruminations if not a hopeful evacuation of his flues? But not all the "definitions" are so neat or so personal. Some are moralizingly banal: "PAIX (Pas aisée à perpétuer)"; some are terribly forced: "MERDE – le dire ou le crier, oh le médiocre remède"; and some mix too many phonemes of Leiris's own to those supplied by his headword: "FRANCE – foutre rance" – which smacks more of prejudice than punning.

This second glossary is not as sharp or as imaginative as the first one, but then Leiris can no longer believe quite in the technique which it calls on. He has gone back to it for old times' sake, but without the hope that fired him when, in his Surrealist days, he fancied that by playing around with words like this he was going to make profound discoveries about language and about life. Seriously in the 1920s and 30s, and nostalgically now, he plays the cratylist, deriving the sense of a word from its sound. It may take some fiddling with the sounds before an acceptable sense emerges but for Leiris this is "poetry", and a defeat for that merely rational belief in the arbitrariness of language, which finds no natural link between the forms of words and those of the world. But in old age he can only flirt with the irrationalism which once mattered so much to him, even if he never fully believed in it. His inspiration now is weak.

But he has not altogether given up the idea that literature is sacred and a practice apart. He tells us in *Langage tangage* of how flat and laconic he is on profane occasions – when using the telephone for instance. He wastes few words *in* life; but *on* life it is different, and especially on his own life. When he writes he is the "poet" for whom language is rich in discoveries and possibly in home truths. "Que les mots vivent, tel est mon voeu d'écrivain", he declares in *Langage tangage*, and then – most unfashionably in these Derridian days –

> Et sans doute faut-il pour cela que dans les mots bientôt figés que j'écris passe la vie de ma voix, exactement ma présence, plus intime et plus forte que dans tout ce que je pourrais dire de vive voix.

How Leiris needs then to write, and how savage he would be being with himself voluntarily to desist. He reflects at one moment here that he has done wrong to *use* poetry as he has, to take his mind off things (mostly death); poetry should be beautifully use-less, not an unhappy man's therapy. The tic of self-reproach is with him to the last. But a few pages further on Leiris is secure again in the faith that Art is the best of all forms of euthanasia. For him that counts as a very positive conclusion.

Making it habitable

Michael Edwards

MICHEL DEGUY
Gisants: Poèmes
40pp. Paris: Gallimard. 95fr.
2070703991

The opening words of *Gisants*, "Je te cherche", place the reader in a receptive uncertainty. They assemble everything as "you": the reader, the world, poetry, the poem, the book; and declare poetry to be, in its origin, not a first-person expression nor a third-person description but an address, a second-person invocation. And they involve the reader in an effort at human contact, and in the activity of the pages to follow.

Such polysemy is, of course, a feature of modern writing, and one is likely to be prepared for it. The title itself sets up numerous expectations, since *gisants* refers to recumbent figures on tombs, stranded vessels, or felled timber, and predicts that the poems themselves may serve as any of those things. What one is less prepared for is the poetry's sheer pace. The speed among meanings, the speed between words and from line to line, can be vertiginous.

The tempo is integral to the writing and its project. It is related in part to Deguy's belief, as stated in *Tombeau de Du Bellay* (1973), that a poem re-echoes "a genesis of the constituent possibilities of language", as if inventing over again the processes by which language signifies. Hence the swiftness, and complexity, of the poetry, which includes all sorts of word-play, fracturing etymologies, unforeseeable associations, names from mythology, geography, the history of art. The language of poetry becomes a series of inexhaustible *trouvailles* and, most noticeably, common expressions suddenly become essential, oracular: "Figure-toi", "c'est tout comme". The writing splendidly justifies, to recall a famous distinction, the use of "vocabulary" rather than "diction".

Those particular apophthegms indicate the centrality for Deguy of figures: the same section of *Tombeau de Du Bellay* claims that "tropes legitimate speed", along with other forms of excess. Figuration has always been his main concern, and has led, I believe, to a renewed understanding of rhetoric. Figurative writing, far from embellishing or transforming "normal" language by virtue of a "licence" which a society accords its more unruly members, is language's proper procedure. It *is* violent, but with the violence intrinsic to giving birth. For what interests Deguy are the "ontological possibilities of rhetoric" (*Actes*, 1966), and in particular by comparison. We compare, suggests a poem in *Gisants*, of necessity, with a mixture of dismay and jubilation: it is because "what is there" ceaselessly rebuffs us and withholds its "presence" that it can also rouse "what is not there". By comparing we encircle a thing with its "likes", and achieve for it the only kind of appearance, or epiphany, of which it is capable, so that in a world where being is "multiplied" and "Babelized", "like", to quote *Actes* again, is the introduction to "the good news".

It is not that rhetoric delineates another world. Since language interposes itself between the I and the other, and since there is no ordinary meaning preceding the figured meaning, rhetoric changes a thing, as it were, into itself, so that it appears "as the figure that it is" [illegible]

Rhetoric operates, according to one of the most accessible poems of *Gisants*, like a little girl transforming a stretch of pavement into a grid for hopscotch – and if that sounds rather simple, Deguy adds that she does so "like" Quixote making of the barber's bowl a helmet. It is the way by which, drawing back from the world, we approach it.

The pace of the writing also derives from a sense of having finally passed from the regular and repeatable prosody of a day–night sequence centred on the planet earth, to the prodigious velocity and return-less voyaging through space of our new centre, the sun. So the poetry is welcoming to any kind of discourse, to verse as to "prose", to professional jargons, to the analysing and quoting of numerous other writers, living as well as dead, and to inquiry into its own status. *Gisants*, indeed, continues to merge poetry and the discussion of poetry indissolubly. The reader, faced with texts that demand such diverse kinds of attention, may decide for a while that this is simply theory in fancy dress. Yet one is soon engaged, and it is one's own definition of poetry that changes. The engagement is not with the sensibility of the poet; the "I" that enters as the first word and that carries the whole book is not there for pathos. Deguy has spoken in an interview of the profusion of language and the profusion of the visible; the self, rather than a corresponding profusion of inwardness, is "interposed", "a place of transit and of translation". The "I" is present as a poet, waiting, depending, desirous, ignorant, embarked on a quest like Cervantes's knight, and, according to an image from an earlier volume which Deguy elucidates in *Gisants*, being drawn backwards through his poem with a view like that from the poop of a ship (in the manner, he adds, of Baudelaire's Don Juan in the underworld: the image is many-faceted). The "I" also occurs in each address to a "you", and is implied in every reference to a physical world.

One is equally engaged in the human implications of likeness. There are two lines in *Oui dire* (1966) which are often quoted, and which are revealing about Deguy's phrasing: "Ma vie / Le mystère du comme." Reading in one direction, the technical term "like" or "as", a word for linguists and metaphysicians, is also the sign of a mystery, and the mystery constitutes, moreover, not an object of study but a life. Reading in the other direction, self-awareness, having disposed the emotional words "ma", "vie" and "mystère", chooses to declare itself finally in the coolness of a conjunction or adverb.

To make the earth, deprived of its Christian significance, habitable, "poetically, that is to say, figurally", is the aim of *Gisants* as of Deguy's other work. The same attempt has engaged French poets from Mallarmé to certain contemporaries of Deguy's, such as Yves Bonnefoy, from whom he otherwise differs markedly. A similar ambition exists in English-language poetry from Stevens and Williams to Charles Tomlinson, and a consciousness of it might form one bridge to reading Deguy. Though habitable, however, the earth in *Gisants* is no more than the "promised land" as promised, never the actual "realization of a paradise". Art is "the possible" not in the sense that it envisages a time when it will have succeeded in finally transforming the earth, but in its permanent "action" of transforming

A universal ethic

Anne Whitmarsh

MARY EVANS
Simone de Beauvoir: A feminist mandarin
142pp. Tavistock. £4.95.
0422795100

Mary Evans has written the first serious study of Simone de Beauvoir as a feminist, defining her place within contemporary feminism and its various strands with their widely differing sets of values and objectives. She has given us a scholarly and very readable analysis, written from a critical though strongly sympathetic standpoint.

For many feminists Beauvoir presents a dilemma. As the author of the most revered feminist text, *The Second Sex*, and as a supporter of women's causes since the early 1970s, she must be accorded a place of honour in the history of feminism. Yet there is little in her other writings or in her way of life, unconventional though it has been, to identify her as a feminist. Moreover some aspects of *The Second Sex* are unacceptable to many feminists. She sees escape from subordination, for other women as for herself, as being made possible only by the pursuit of the male values of individualism, independence, achievement and rationality. All that is physically or emotionally associated with the female condition must by the same token be rejected, and thus the dialectic of the sexes will be surmounted. Implicit in her thesis is the idea that women are often willing victims and accept out of "bad faith" the passive and subordinate role assigned to them by the dominant sex, and she shows a complete lack of understanding of the material, psychological and social constraints that operate to limit the possibility of absolutely free choice. It is argued that Beauvoir [illegible]

Western, patriarchal, capitalist society while ignoring the more positive aspects of femininity and exaggerating the differences between the sexes. Furthermore this individualistic approach is unlikely to lead to major changes in society.

Seeking a contemporary feminist message in Beauvoir's life and work, Evans finds her an inadequate source – but such a message was never intended, and her writing about feminist issues is confined to *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir's abiding concern was with a universal ethic for men and women alike: rationality, autonomy, self-realization are characteristics which human beings possess in varying degrees but which all should aim to possess in order to lead fulfilled lives according to the existentialist ideal. They are prescribed for women in *The Second Sex* in order to escape their oppression, but in the context of her total *oeuvre* the application is universal.

Mary Evans complains that other commentators have not been sufficiently critical and yet she herself, having carefully questioned many aspects of Beauvoir's feminism and even her socialism, still accepts certain other elements of the Beauvoir cult. The perfectly democratic life-style with few material possessions was, after all, a privileged existence spent in cafés and restaurants among the intelligentsia, or in travelling the world. Which honours has she refused? She has always spoken out, but the reiteration of her political convictions in her writings does not amount to any coherent argument which would shake society, and it is an exaggeration to talk of her making courageous and dangerous political gestures.

Like many who have studied Beauvoir in detail and found her wanting, Mary Evans has not lost her admiration for her subject and she is anxious to offset her criticism by stressing the many positive qualities we all value in the [illegible]

All against humanity

Tzvetan Todorov

ROBERT SCHOLES
Textual Power: Literary theory and the teaching of English
176pp. Yale University Press. £13.95.
0300033508

When a foreigner visiting France asks me, "What's going on in French criticism these days?" I always feel rather stupid; I either remain silent or else change the subject. I am unaware of the trends, being familiar only with a certain number of individuals following paths which have no obvious connection with one another. Conversely, in the United States, where I spend only a few weeks a year, I have the impression of observing a coherent picture, and would have no difficulty in responding to the same question. I had always attributed this difference to my own vantage-point: in France I lack the distance necessary to keen observation, whereas in the United States – being no longer a participant but a visitor – I enjoy the privilege attributed by Montesquieu to Persians in Paris. This privilege, however, has its drawbacks (the absence of extensive knowledge and infallible intuitions) which would have been enough to prevent me from ever expressing myself on the subject of American criticism, had I not read *Textual Power*. This book paints a picture of the critical scene in the United States so similar to my own that I cannot help but wonder – ever ready to be self-congratulatory – whether the coincidence might not have something to do with the picture's accuracy.

Let me first describe American criticism as it used to be. Up until – roughly speaking – 1968, the majority of American critics seemed preoccupied by one crucial question: "What does this text mean?" Confronted with a text upon which they were to comment, they held at least one conviction in common, namely that the most important thing to do was to determine as accurately as possible what the text was trying to say. Disagreements arose only when it came to how to accomplish this. Which was the most reliable path to the desired answer? Should one pay attention to historical events contemporary with the book or to its stylistic properties? To the motivations of its author or to the rules of its genre? The only critics who fell outside the general consensus were those that might be called didactic (and they were usually journalists rather than academics, though the two are not mutually exclusive): those, that is, who wrote in pursuit of their own goals, and who used works from the past without worrying much about whether their appraisal of them was true or false.

Structuralism, the newest comer to this scene, had not made any fundamental changes in its dynamics. Whether of the type practised by Northrop Frye or that inherited from the Russian Formalists, structural analysis, like its predecessors, aspired to furnish a better answer to the same question, calling attention in this case to the internal construction of literary works (and thereby leaving other aspects aside – but this, too, was something structuralism shared with other approaches).

Such, then, was the backdrop against which the new tendency in American criticism was to appear. This tendency has been called "post-structuralism", a name I find rather unfortunate, as it implies both continuity (else it would be meaningless) and transcendence (as though progression in time necessarily meant progression in quality), whereas in fact it represents a drastic discontinuity. Post-structuralism is basically of two sorts (although in fact there are a large number of variants and transitional forms); both, however, have one thing in common: they make the traditional question "What does this text mean?" wholly irrelevant. The first of the two sorts – it is also the more dogmatic and the more sophisticated – is known as "deconstruction"; with some simplification, it might be described as making the question about what a text means obsolete by invariably furnishing the answer: "Nothing". The second kind, more amusing but also more naive, sometimes called "pragmaticism" by its advocates, renders the question pointless by answering: "Anything". Once one has received either of these answers, one can hardly go on asking the same question, and generally prefers to move on to something else.

Deconstruction seems to be characterized by three interrelated hypotheses. First, it is impossible to know the world: only discourse exists, and discourse can refer only to other discourses. Here, one can find declarations of intention in abundance: "There is no such thing as an outside-of-the-text;" "I don't believe that anything like perception exists." The text "liberates us from the empirical object"; the text produces "a structure of infinite referral in which there are only traces"; literature is an "endless naming and renaming of the void". Second, for all that, one must not be misled into thinking that discourse is any better off than reality: the latter may be inexistent, but the former is necessarily incoherent. Deconstructionist commentary always consists in showing that the text under study contains contradictions; that its avowed intentions are undermined by the way it actually works. There is therefore an "insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding". Third, as no discourse is exempt from contradiction, there is no reason to favour one kind above another, or to choose one value in preference to another. Indeed, any behaviour that orients itself according to values (criticism, struggle against injustice, hope for a better world) becomes, in the deconstructionist perspective, quite pathetic.

Howard Hodgkin's print "Souvenir", from the exhibition at the Tate Gallery, reviewed on page 1102.

One could say a number of things about this critical approach – and Professor Scholes (following M. H. Abrams, Edward Said and a few others) does say a number of things. The first feature of the idea of textual incoherency one may be struck by is its dogmatism: it concerns all texts indifferently, making no distinction between literature, theoretical discourse (philosophy, law, ethics, politics) and empirical discourse (the sciences); here, everything becomes "literature". One might also wonder whether this idea is not a bit pretentious: contradiction is human, certainly, but is it likely that these particular contradictions escaped the attention of thinkers such as Plato, Rousseau or Kant, whereas they are visible to the naked eye of the most modest deconstructionist? When a scrupulous commentator sets about "thinking with" Rousseau (as in France, for instance, Goldschmidt and Philonenko have done), many apparent incoherencies vanish and the role played by the "un-thought" shrinks considerably.

The hypothesis of an inaccessible world is also somewhat exaggerated. Since Kant, it has been a commonplace of epistemology to recognize the constructed nature of knowledge and to question the belief in a transparent perception of objects; thus, it is legitimate to criticize empiricists and positivists. But refusing the very idea that perception might have some content implies a logical leap that one should look before making. As Scholes says, there is something excessive in the affirmation that "sign-systems affect perception but the world does not". The discourse of knowledge does have something to do with reality, and not only with itself. Scholes uses a delightful example to illustrate the idea of the "referent"'s independence with respect to the "signifier": that of the connection between the word "kangaroo" and the thing that went hopping around Captain Cook. He evokes many eloquent examples of excessive scepticism and rightly concludes that "from the perspective of deconstruction, there is nothing upon which we can ground an argument for evolutionary biology as opposed to fundamentalist creationism, since both are discourses, with their blindness and their insights". As for literature, although indeed it does not refer directly to particular objects, it is not wholly deprived of a dimension of truth: if, in our day and age, we continue to read Shakespeare, it is because we have the feeling (even if we are unable to account for it) that he helps us better to understand "human nature", or something of the sort.

Dismissing the idea of judgments and values also leads to insurmountable aporias. In order to make their task less arduous, deconstructionists seem to have assimilated all values to religious values, thus rejecting the distinction between faith and reason; they speak of reason itself as a reincarnation of God, no less, sweeping away in a single pen-stroke several centuries of struggle. Or else they lump everything together under another buzz-word, "power", thus making it impossible to distinguish between police repression and the use of reason, between violence and law. This having been accomplished, they can take refuge – with the clearest of consciences – in a "quietistic acceptance of injustice".

Deconstruction is a "dogmatic scepticism" (Eugene Goodheart), which means that it reunites the worst of two worlds. It is a scepticism in that it considers knowledge and judgment, truth and justice, to be impossible. But it is also dogmatic, since it decides in advance what each text means: namely, nothing. Deconstructive exegeses are extremely monotonous, because the outcome is "always-already" known; the only things that vary are the methods used to reach it. Deconstruction is, as Hillis Miller, one of its more lucid (or more naive) devotees has put it, "a demonstration that the text has already dismantled itself", and each reading "reaches, in the particular way the given text allows it, the 'same' moment of an aporia". St Augustine, the theoretician of a different hermeneutic dogmatism, said that the path followed by the reader mattered little; his interpretation would be correct provided that it ultimately led to the triumph of charity. Here, the goal is different but the strategy remains the same: "Whatever track the reader follows through the poem he arrives at blank contradictions." It is most likely this dogmaticism which accounts for deconstruction's extraordinary success in academic institutions: all one need do is apply the formula to new material, and one comes up with an "original" exegesis.

The other main variant of "post-structuralism", pragmaticism (whose most prominent representative is Stanley Fish), obtains results which are considerably less monotonous. Its central hypotheses are as follows. A text means nothing in and of itself; it is the reader who gives it meaning. This statement actually contains two propositions. The first, which is negative ("there are no determinate meanings and the stability of the text is an illusion"), would make the pragmaticist position appear close to the deconstructionist one, except for the fact that they use different arguments: whereas the latter claim that discourses are incoherent, the former maintain that words themselves have no meaning; thus, one is "suspicious" of the molecules of language and the other of its atoms. The second proposition, however, is positive: the reader, and therefore the critic, too, can propose and impose a determinate and stable meaning. "Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them." Thus, the text becomes a test – a Rorschach – in which readers have the right to choose their meanings like so many Pirandello characters: "Each in his own way." In this context, naturally, "the notion of a mistake, at least as something to be avoided, disappears".

What are the effects of this conviction on the critical work itself? "It relieves me of the obligation to be right and demands only that I be interesting." This is a far cry from deconstructive monotony: creative imagination can have a field-day. In his more recent writings, Fish seems to have softened his relativism into historicism, affirming that it is not the individual reader who decides on the meaning of a poem, but rather the group to which he belongs: "It is interpretative communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features."

The negative part of the first hypothesis is both empirically false and logically contradictory. It is false because it ignores the social nature of language: neither individuals nor lobbies are free to change the meanings of words. Even the most idiosyncratic usage, the most daring metaphor, the most obscure allusion presuppose a commonly shared language; this is precisely what is reflected by dictionaries (if such were not the case, one would have to ask what they do contain). The statement is self-contradictory because it presupposes that we can understand it, while explicitly denying that this is possible. Hence, the positive part of the hypothesis seems hyperbolic: of course, readers always read in a certain way – no reading is transparent – but this hardly implies that they produce the entire meaning (which brings us back to the problem of perception).

The idea that one's writing should be interesting rather than accurate only seems shocking – if, indeed, it does – because of the field to which it is applied. No one would feel outraged if a similar criterion were applied to literature itself, although it might be felt that such a conception of literature – which would raise detective novels to the highest rank – did not quite do it justice. What is challenged by this conception of criticism – and in fact of history in general – is its empirical ambition. The idea is easier to swallow where criticism is concerned: who would dare require historians to throw all care for truth to the winds and try only to be interesting? Who would accept that "interest" should be the sole guideline in the discourse of a judge or a politician? But when it comes to the amusement park of literature, no one is dismayed by an irresponsible opinion.

Fish's initial conception of reading turns it into what Lichtenberg calls (apropos of Jacob Boehme) a sort of picnic: the author brings the words and the reader the meaning. His later conception takes us closer to Humpty Dumpty: it is the master who decides on the meanings of words. In this connection, Scholes rightly invokes the Orwellian universe of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which the Party is the "interpretative community" that decides on the nature and meaning of past events, by constantly rewriting history. To claim that there is no difference between facts and interpretations (in other worlds that "everything is interpretation") is to consider force ("the carrot and the stick") as the only way of imposing one's views. Years ago, Raymond Aron warned against this confusion:

> It can no doubt be maintained, in the spirit of philosophical exactness, that every historical fact is a construct, and that it therefore implies selection and interpretation. But, when applied, these distinctions

(facts vs. interpretations) preserve their full implications. It is either true or false that Trotsky played a considerable role in organizing the red army; it is either true or false that Zinoviev or Bukharin plotted the assassination of Stalin . . . . Every totalitarian state exaggerates, to the point of absurdity, the link between fact and interpretation.

Is it valid to bring these two critical tendencies together under a single name ("post-structuralism"), despite their theoretical and rhetorical divergences? I believe it is. They both have their roots in Nietzsche. They have the same enemies: universal values, justice and ethics on the one hand; truth, knowledge and science on the other. They also have the same affinities: with the more or less explicit praise of force (hence their companionship with Harold Bloom, another militant Nietzschean), as well as with subjective idealism (the world does not exist in and of itself but only in my perception).

In the face of this school of criticism, if there are still people who persist in believing that books are in some kind of relation to the world and that some values are not only better than others but worth fighting for, whence can they draw their inspiration? Interestingly enough, the main tendency in American criticism that adamantly maintains this other position is Marxism, with the result that the alternative might be formulated as follows: if you don't want to be a "post-structuralist", be a Marxist. Scholes himself, who is not one, has some trouble dissociating his position from that of the Marxist. And yet there are a certain number of coincidences that might make us doubt whether the opposition is as radical as all that. For example, the idea of an "interpretative community" that controls meaning and interpretation is hardly foreign to Marxist doctrine: the latter states that everything hinges on the class to which one belongs. It is no accident that Communist totalitarianism is an offshoot of Marxism.

Criticism of a Marxist inspiration postulates, it is true, a relationship between literary works and the world. But this relationship is a specific one (after all, even common sense postulates that there is *some* relationship): what interests Marxist criticism is neither the book as a representation of the world nor the book as a statement about the world; instead, it is the world (or rather a fraction of it) as the origin of the book. Marxist criticism is genealogical criticism: if you say to a Marxist, "The salt is on the table", he will never ask himself, "Is that true?" but only "Why did (s)he say that?"; it differs from other genealogical criticisms (such as the Freudian) in that it places its faith in the notion of social class. In this game, conscience always loses out to "gut reaction", and every utterance – however universal its intention – is reduced to the particularity of its enunciation: it is of necessity "historical", and that is all that counts.

Marxist criticism recognizes certain values, and only certain values, as being relevant. Anything that claims to be a universal or "inter-class" value arouses its particular animosity. The rhetorical device most often used to denigrate these values consists simultaneously of abstraction (liberty is liberalism; individual rights are individualism) and tendentious particularization (liberalism means the right to fire your workers whenever you like; individualism means the right to send your children to smaller schools). In this way, "liberalism", "individualism" and "humanism" become dirty words. Any effort to rise above a particular determination is brought back to its humble origin: for example, humanism is nothing more than a "suburban moral ideology". Marxism refuses to recognize the dividing-line between ethics and politics: it considers politics as simply an ethics taken seriously. This means that any quest for values is reduced to the defence of a particular group's interests: good is defined as whatever contributes to the "socialist transformation of the society", no matter how the members of that society might feel about it. *And instead of right and justice, it is the forces* of history whose praises are sung.

To the universalist aspirations of science, Marxism opposes social and historical determinism; the role of common ethics is played by the politics of particular advantage. Thus, Marxist criticism recognizes the relationship between literary works and values, but it refuses universality, insisting that truth and justice are grounded in history rather than in reason. It can thus be seen that the opposition between Marxism and "post-structuralism" is not as radical as all that: above and beyond their minor disagreements, both are fighting a common enemy, and that enemy's name is humanism – that is, in the present case, the attempt to ground science and ethics in reason, and to practise them in a universal way. It is now possible to see why there have been so many attempts to hybridize these two apparently hostile schools of thought: not only because of the superficial wish to be as avant-garde as possible, but also because of the deep affinities between them. A test: who said that "the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power"? No, not Terry Eagleton, but Michel Foucault.

If we wish to call a spade a spade, we must conclude that the dominant tendency of American criticism is anti-humanism. The word might have unpleasant connotations, and it might be objected that its advocates do not usually behave like bloodthirsty monsters. I quite agree – in fact, nowadays even Marxists are careful to dissociate themselves from what is called "real socialism", and from Stalinist concentration camps. I can personally testify that Paul de Man was a delightful man, and that Stanley Fish still is. I am not saying that they themselves are inhuman; I am merely saying that it is impossible (without being inconsistent) to defend human rights out of one side of your mouth while deconstructing the idea of humanity out of the other.

What paths remain open, then, to contemporary criticism? I personally feel most attracted by what one might call a critical humanism. Scholes gives a good idea of the meaning of "critical" which matters here; I would add that this adjective should make us extra-cautious about fraudulent uses of the same concept. This is not an idle warning: the humanist camouflage of European colonialism, for example, nearly succeeded in jeopardizing the humanist cause once and for all. Thus, a relationship between literature and the world must be recognized – "the whole point of my argument", Scholes writes, "is that we must open the way between the literary or verbal text and the social text in which we live" – as must the relationship of both to values:

> We will have to restore the judgmental dimension to criticism, not in the trivial sense of ranking literary texts, but in the most serious sense of questioning the values proffered by the texts we study.

What I would hope, without really believing it possible, is that this whole unfortunate episode of contemporary criticism be rapidly forgotten, in order that we might make a new departure from the former conception of criticism. The question, "What does this text mean?" is a relevant one, and we must still try to answer it, without discarding any context – historical, structural or other – which can assist us in this task. For all that, one need not stop there: another, twofold question can be addressed to the answer of the former one: "Is it true? And is it right?" In this way, we might transcend the sterile dichotomy between specialist critics who know but do not think, and moralist critics who speak while not knowing much about the works of literature they speak about. And the literary critic might begin at last to play the role he has always been intended to play, that of a participant in a double dialogue: as reader, with his author; as author, with his own readers – who, in that event, might even be more numerous.

Playing the field

Peter France

ALAIN VIALA
Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique
317pp. Paris: Minuit. 120fr.
2 7073 1025 5

The words "literature" and "writer" (and their French equivalents) are too often used as if they were timeless entities. Alain Viala's interesting book, a shortened version of a French doctoral thesis, has the merit of showing in detail part of the historical process by which "literature" separated off from other forms of writing and the profession of "écrivain" came into being. It is a contribution to the sociology of literature, a historical contribution centred on a brief period, the mid-seventeenth century, in one country, France.

The author has little time for the work of either Lucien Goldmann, seen as a proponent of the "reflection" theory of culture, or Robert Escarpit, whose quantitative approach is dismissed, rather cursorily, as "positivist". The driving force behind these pages is Pierre Bourdieu, whose concept of the "cultural field" (the metaphor refers to magnetic fields, but perhaps also to battlefields) provides Viala with his framework, and whose more recent work on "distinction" and "symbolic goods" is echoed on many pages. The depressing image of society offered here is one in which individuals jostle for pre-eminence and material reward in a hierarchical world whose configuration is determined by a shifting set of formal and informal institutions. In this world any "creative project" (to use a term taken from Bourdieu's seminal 1966 article in *Les Temps Modernes*) is inescapably subjected to social "mediations" (this term, like "project", refers back to the work of Sartre, whose *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* is another of the author's corner-stones). Thus a "pragmatique sociale de la littérature" would aim "rendre compte des propriétés thématiques et formelles des oeuvres en les mettant en relation avec l'ensemble des possibles défini par l'état de la via littéraire et avec l'ensembles des médiations quis s'y jouent".

In fact Viala does not engage in much detailed exegesis of this kind, contenting himself, for instance, with rapid discussions of the social significance of Racine's defence of simplicity in the preface to *Bérénice* or of the socially produced duplicity of a number of classical texts. But his book is really a preparation for such readings. It provides above all an analysis of the different institutions which made up the literary field and of the various strategies used by writers to make their way in it.

The main elements of the field are academies, patronage (divided into *le clientélisme*, the more or less permanent attachment of writers to powerful people or institutions, and *le mécénat*, the rewards bestowed on authors), authorial rights and payments, the press, the *salons*, educational institutions and the different strata of the literary public. Through his analysis of all this the author shows the emergence of a relatively autonomous and powerful literary field within the broader cultural field. But the autonomy was precarious. The many new academies permitted the formation of a professional body of writers and gave them dignity and status, but these academies were rapidly taken over by officialdom and became seats of forced conformity. To receive a pension was a consecration, but also an enslavement. And the growing appeal of literature to the nobility gave prestige to the profession, while laying it open to the dangers of amateurism. Almost too repetitively, we are told of the ambiguities which this state of things created for writers and the duplicity it could lead to. This is surely not a particularly new observation; the believers in the harmonious wholeness of French classicism are straw men these days.

The second part of the book considers authorial strategies. Depending on their starting-point (rich or poor, noble or commoner), four main paths were open to writers. Their writing might be the natural consequence of their pro- [...] orations. Or they might write as enlightened amateurs, like the noble La Rochefoucauld. But if they were professionals, they would either incline towards what Viala calls the *cursus* – the steady, respectable path through academies and patronage taken by a Chapelain or a Pellisson – or – and here we find many of the surviving classics, particularly the dramatists – they might make a more audacious initial bid for public favour, which would only subsequently be crowned by academic success and patronage. These four paths are useful simplifications, of course, and the actual careers of writers combined them in varying proportions.

Although the appearance of the professional writer in France has often been dated considerably later than it is here, the picture that emerges from this study will probably not be very surprising to those who are familiar with seventeenth-century French literature and the existing work on its social dimension. It is presented, however, with an impressive wealth of empirical backing – and much more is no doubt available in the full-scale thesis. In particular, there is a list of 559 writers for the years 1643–65, giving for each of them an indication of their involvement with patronage, *salons*, academies and royalties, the strategies they favoured, the genres they worked in, and their place in the ranking orders of their day and ours. A lot can be learned from this. But where do the 559 names come from? Viala has a complete and much longer list of some 2,200 "authors" for the same period, but he uses the term "writer" (*écrivain*) as it was tending to be used at the time, to refer to those who published books with aesthetic pretensions. And in fact one of the most interesting points to emerge from this study is that the mid-seventeenth century saw not only the establishment of a new literary field, but the domination of this field, for the first time, by a rather broader version of the narrow thing we now call literature – in this case *belles-lettres*, history and oratory. The *nouveaux doctes*, professionals and literary purists with a strong interest in form, backed by the noble amateurs, steal the [...] tional proponents of a learned humanist culture. The essential question is increasingly: can he write? We are on the way to Barthes's distinction between the *écrivain* (an artist in words) and the *écrivant* (an instrumental word-user).

In a way what Viala has done is like a weightier version of what is done for Eng Lit in the work of Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton and others. Such a historical analysis of the coming into being of modern categories will encourage readers to look at their own situation and assumptions with more suspicious eyes. This can only be welcomed if it discourages question-begging and bullying assertions about art, literature, poetry or whatever. At the same time it is worrying in so far as it tends towards a destructive reduction of literary texts to the results of social strategies, whether of writers or of readers. A Bourdieu can show, statistics in hand, that members of a certain group, with a certain education, will be more likely to have a taste for, say, Baroque music or Piero della Francesca. Fair enough, and everyone is familiar with the snobbish uses of art. But it is a strain, to say the least, to try to combine this sociological vision and self-awareness with that kind of personal relation with a novel, a film or a picture which members of all social classes invest so much in. We have to hold on to the beauty or value we see in these things, while remaining aware that they are only relative and can be seen from outside as our (or the artists') self-interested attempt to negotiate the cultural field (or minefield) in which we live.

Is it the same for truth as for beauty? Seen from one angle, Viala's book is a serious contribution to historical knowledge. From another it could no doubt be analysed as part of an academic strategy in terms of such institutions as the French doctoral thesis, the University and the Collège de France (where Bourdieu teaches), or the publishing house and collection in which it appears. Presumably the author would welcome this – and of course he could apply the same approach to [...]

The transcendental perspective

Jennifer Hornsby

ZENO VENDLER
The Matter of Minds
176pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £14.95.
0 19 824431 2

One way in which we can conceive of a world in which there is no consciousness is by conceiving of a world from which we and other animals are absent. What Zeno Vendler asks us to conceive of is a world without consciousness in which we and other animals are *present*. He thinks that if we conceive of the actual world objectively, or purely scientifically, then we shall find bodies in it, including human and other animal bodies, but that these will be merely bodies, without any inner lives. And Professor Vendler says that it is not only this picture framed in the imagination from which all animus is lacking: even the data we receive in experience are objective, like the contents of the picture. So, according to him, it is impossible to show on the basis of experience that there are minds. None the less our attributions of consciousness are justified. *The Matter of Minds* is concerned to explain how.

In philosophy it is not unusual for it to be suggested that all knowledge of *other* minds is problematic: one is supposed to need some warrant for the belief that, seeing and hearing human bodies which aren't one's own, one is not confronting the sort of unconscious automata that inhabit Vendler's imagined objective world. But Vendler's imagined world does not contain his *own* mind. His body is there among the non-animated animals, only nothing in the picture reveals this thing as the locus of a mind. To recognize himself as a sentient being, and to locate his own body in the world requires the exercise on his part of a capacity to project or "to imagine what it is like to be an organism". When he has found a body whose projected experiences match the ones he actually has, he will have found himself. But, says Vendler, carrying out the projection for his own case requires an indiscriminate attribution of consciousness to other "deserving organisms". His own mind, although it is that to which he has privileged access, has no privileged status in the world.

Vendler's account leaves a great deal to the imagination. That there are minds in the world, and that I am who I am – these facts, he says, "cannot pertain to the description of the world". And the imagination is at work again, operating its schemata to evoke the appropriate presentations, whenever we recognize ordinary things as the things they are or as of the sorts of thing they are. Much of the book is devoted to discussing the imagination. Vendler wants to know, for instance, what makes it true that I imagine one person rather than another, given that my images may provide only a defective and inaccurate representation of the person I mean to think about. In all this discussion, the imagination takes on an ordinary guise. It is the faculty that we should all acknowledge to be at work when we go in for imagining. The particular exercise of transference, or of imagining being someone, that enables us to conceive of the possibility of minds, is a limiting case of one familiar species that Vendler calls subjective. In subjective imagination the aim is to represent a consciousness, whereas in objective imagination the aim is to represent a thing as it appears in the field of experience.

Even in its most homely employment, the faculty of imagination is said to be a faculty of the Kantian transcendental self. This is the "I" whose experiences we identify before we project and find ourselves in the world. It is a subject without a name and not amenable to description. It is the source of human freedom, being a determinant of the events for which people are held responsible although not a cause itself. This is all very mysterious. But Vendler acknowledges that it is. And he never resorts to obscurity of formulation; the transcendental self is dealt with in the same fresh and easy style as the structural analysis of such sentences as "Imagine swimming in that water" or "Joe broke the window".

The motivation for the transcendental self is in one way quite intelligible. Vendler sees that there is no place for mind in a reality whose only aspect is non-subjective. And he thinks that in order to avoid the Cartesian predicament in which it seems as if one's own individual point of view is the only place for a mind, he needs a sort of schematic mind open to the presentation of one or another consciousness. The transcendental self is then a sort of universal vessel whose purely subjective contents can be linked to persons and other animals as the epiphenomena of states they are objectively in.

But there is a difficulty. If one is to transfer features of experience on to the scientists' world, one requires knowledge of matches between these subjective features and kinds of bodily state observable from an objective viewpoint. How could there be such knowledge (knowledge, one might say, of exactly how the non-animated is to be animated) even while the only available view of empirical reality is devoid of all subjectivity? Vendler says that it does not matter how we have actually come by the idea of minds. Of course we have this idea, so that when we come to refute the sceptic about other minds from a transcendental perspective all we need do is exploit knowledge of the subjective/objective matches, however problematic acquisition of such knowledge may seem. But should Vendler have allowed the subjective and objective to come apart in such a way as to provide the materials whose assemblage is the object of the putative knowledge?

Vendler allows that in imagining a world which contains our own and other animal bodies, we imagine a world which contains all the stuff of minds. Ought it then to be as hard as he finds it to resist the suggestion that this world can already be seen as containing all the facts about minds? But it seems incredible that the world could be seen to contain all the facts about minds even while there was nothing that it was like for its inhabitants to be the subjects of experience. In that case, one ought not to need help from the transcendental self in order to identify one's experiences as the experiences of a subject within the experienced world. Consciousness should be sought in a world viewed as it is experienced, under the aspect of the subjectivity of its subjects.

Beckoning and pointing

D. W. D. Owen

MARTIN HOLLIS
Invitation to Philosophy
179pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £14.50 (paperback, £4.95).
0 631 14225 8
ANTHONY O'HEAR
What Philosophy Is: An introduction to contemporary philosophy
316pp. Penguin. Paperback, £4.95.
0 14 022510 2

Martin Hollis has written an excellent general book on philosophy, in the "Invitations" series published by Blackwell's. He explicitly contrasts it with an introduction:

> Invitations beckon and Introductions point. An introduction should provide a sketch of a landscape and a map of the start of the main paths into it. It should be judicious and informative. Introductions to Philosophy are the devil to write. . . .

None the less, his book provides a wonderful introduction to the subject for both the general reader and the beginning student, and will be read with profit and pleasure by those more seasoned in the discipline.

It starts with a chapter on the necessary philosophical virtues of wonder, curiosity and vision. Rather than simply paying lip-service to these qualities, Hollis connects them in an interesting fashion with the notions of frameworks of thought, paradox, and the distinction between open and closed questions. Roughly speaking, closed questions pose a paradox within a framework, but when answered provide an explanation that removes the power of the paradox to subvert the framework. Open questions, on the other hand, are more typically philosophical; no final answers are reached, and those answers that find favour involve a radical shift of framework. The traditional question of the compatibility of free will with determinism is used here, and not just for illustration. Rather the whole book builds towards a more sophisticated treatment of the question in the final chapter. In fact, one of the best features of the book is the coherence with which it is structured. The subsequent chapters on reasoning and argument, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and moral and political philosophy are all given a place in an intellectual activity that culminates in the last chapter, on free will.

Invitation to Philosophy is written with great verve. But nowhere is rigour abandoned or a difficult issue glossed over. The chapter on reasoning, for example, is a model of how to introduce the topics of argument, proof, evidence and probability while avoiding both technicality and shallowness. Excellent examples of famous arguments are used: Euclid's proof that there is no greatest prime number, Mill's proofs of the principle of utility, Sherlock Holmes's methods of observation and deduction, the paradox of the surprise exam, etc. I suspect that anyone ignorant of philosophy who doesn't enjoy this book isn't temperamentally suited to the subject.

Anthony O'Hear's *What Philosophy Is: An Introduction to contemporary philosophy* provides an interesting comparison to Hollis's book. Superficially it is similar, as it covers all the same subjects, as well as containing a long opening chapter on metaphysics. There are also similarities of structure – both discuss the possibility of religious knowledge in terms set up by a prior investigation into philosophy of science. Interestingly, though both lay heavy stress on knowledge and scepticism, neither sees fit to mention the fascinating recent arguments of Nozick. This is surprising in O'Hear's book though not in Hollis's, as the former appears to be an attempt to bring the reader up to date on many of the most recent developments across the whole spectrum of modern Anglo-American philosophy. With the exception of the last chapter, this difficult task is done with concision, clarity, and a remarkable even-handedness. Different positions held by modern philosophers are carefully elucidated and contrasted one with another. No position is mentioned that lacks merit, but neither does any escape criticism. There is a tendency to favour moderate realism about, eg, material objects, abstract entities, events, meanings and consciousness, while maintaining a healthy suspicion about scepticism (except where it is directed against induction), God, essences, causal necessity and rights.

A work of modestly critical exposition of so many important issues, as developed by philosophers in the past twenty-five years, is not to be sneezed at. It is extremely difficult to do at all, let alone do well. But one wonders who the book could possibly be aimed at. There is not enough detail on any one subject for it to be useful as a textbook in an introductory course on, say, metaphysics or moral philosophy. Nor could the book be of much use to the intelligent but philosophically naive general reader, or the beginner starting his first course in philosophy. For instance, few innocent of logic will comprehend the four-page summary of the propositional and predicate calculus, nor understand why the asserted but unexplained completeness of the former is so important. The same point can be made, though less forcefully, about essentialism, causal necessity, "truth-conditions" theories of meaning, "austere" theories of sense, etc. But what use will those not so innocent of such topics make of the book? One might say that those who need the book won't understand it, while those who understand it won't need it. But perhaps those who have struggled through Quine, Davidson, Wiggins etc will find it useful to refresh their memory, or helpful in reminding them of the general picture they may have lost in mastering the details of the various theories.

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ANNE TYLER
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355pp. Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press. £8.95.
0 7011 2986 7

The Accidental Tourist is the title not only of Anne Tyler's new novel but also of a series of guide books for business travellers written by the book's hero, Macon Leary. These guides enable his readers to deny the difference of other places by reproducing the patterns of their lives at home.

What hotels in Madrid boasted king-sized Beautyrest mattresses? What restaurants in Tokyo offered Sweet'n'Low? Did Amsterdam have a McDonald's? Did Mexico City have a Taco Bell? Did any place in Rome serve Chef Boyardee ravioli? Other travelers hoped to discover distinctive local wines; Macon's readers searched for pasteurized and homogenized milk.

Travel-writing in this obsessively homogenizing genre expresses Macon Leary's character in all its systematic defensiveness; and in fact he turns out to have been hand-picked for the job. An entrepreneurial publisher had read an article that Macon contributed to a Baltimore local paper while still working at the family bottle-cap factory, about a craft fair in nearby Washington. Julian Edge, reading that "The streets are not like ours and don't even run at right angles", realized that here was an approach that could profitably be extended.

The Accidental Tourist series is produced in effect by a lucrative neurosis; and it is a sublime bit of novelistic business. It gives Tyler all the advantages of having an artist hero (not having, for instance, to invent a working life to counterbalance a private drama), and none of the disadvantages. Macon Leary's job is perfectly expressive of him, and involves little or no distorting feedback, since he is represented on the cover of his books not by a name but by a logo: a winged armchair.

Macon's defences take something of a battering in the course of the novel. His twelve-year-old son Ethan has already been killed in a fast-food restaurant hold-up when the book begins; in the opening chapter his wife Sarah (his first and only girlfriend) leaves him, partly through rage at the invisibility of his mourning.

Since Macon lives by system, Sarah's leaving precipitates him into an orgy of order. He rigs up a percolator and a popcorn machine by his bed, on a time switch. He tramples the day's dirty clothes underfoot while he takes his evening shower, and he stitches sheets into body-bags so that he can do without the labour of conventional sheet-changing. These actions are so expressive of a sort of organized despair, of a collapse that masquerades as a triumph of time-and-motion study, that it's a shame Tyler takes Macon all the way to a conventional breakdown, while he is ordering dog-biscuits by phone:

I just want the simplest thing, it seems to me: one puny box of Milkbone biscuits up beside my bed. If I give Edward my buttered popcorn it upsets his stomach. Otherwise I wouldn't mind; it's not as if I'm hoarding it all to myself or something, but he has this sensitivity to fats and I'm the only one in the house, it's me who has to clean up if he gets sick. I'm the only one to do it; I'm all alone; it's just me; it seems everybody's just . . . fled from me, I don't know, I've lost them, I'm left standing here saying, "Where'd they go? Where is everybody? Oh, God, what did I do that was so bad?"

The strange thing about the book's occasional patches of cuteness or banality (and the Accidental Tourist motif is undoubtedly hammered home) is that they are always surrounded by passages that treat the same material with confident freshness.

So Macon's relationship with his dead son is well conveyed by spasms of memory, such as a remembered conversation about cinema seats (Macon wants a strategy for nobbling the best seats, Ethan just wants to see the film), or a reference to Macon always having treated Ethan as a sort of exchange student; less successfully by dreams in which Ethan is falling off a merry-go-round, calling "Catch me!", and Macon is unable to reach him.

Edward, he of the sensitivity to fats, is sensitive also to marital breakdown, and develops personality problems of his own when Macon, having broken a leg, moves back in with his brothers and sister. Edward takes the plot between his teeth when he becomes so unreliable that a dog-trainer becomes an urgent necessity; the dog-trainer, Muriel Pritchett, young and deeply disorganized, becomes the second woman in Macon Leary's life.

Edward's range of mood and gesture is brilliantly depicted throughout, from his posture when he is delivered to kennels, "standing upright now and clinging to Macon's knees, like a toddler scared of nursery school", to his hot breath and the oddly intimate dampness of his teeth, when he bites.

The opposed eccentricities of the two households, Muriel's desperately courageous mess and the Learys' compulsive regularity, make for entertaining reading. As Macon is drawn more and more to Muriel, so his young employer Julian, hitherto a preppy playboy, starts paying court to Macon's sister Rose. For once, the author's desire for a plot-twist takes precedence over truth to character: Rose has been portrayed with such dry sexlessness that when she mentions Julian's romantic interest in her the reader is cued to diagnose virgin dementia. Much more satisfying is the moment some time after their marriage when Rose moves back with her bothers, and then Julian moves in too, even mastering "Vaccination", a rebarbative family card-game that could have been devised for its spouse-repellent qualities. Julian's obsession has always been with the household as much as with Rose.

Macon's romantic destiny is less smoothly dramatized. In particular, there are two key moments, one when Sarah claims him back and another when he stays awake all night to make his final decision between the two women, which are oddly rushed or evaded. In a book which rejoices in its ability to fill in the corners with bright reticulated detail, these slight central skimpings are all the more surprising.

Any American novel which elevates the ordinary and finds it full of complex grace is likely to stand in John Cheever's lyric shadow; and this is true particularly of one moment in *The Accidental Tourist*, when Macon, picking up his passport from a safe deposit box, is moved by the assistant's tact in looking elsewhere while he rummages. But Anne Tyler, when she doesn't settle for a pathos that her own best form makes irrelevant, achieves a distinctive comic combination of warmth and astringency, one which is likely to make her in her turn a powerful influence.

Other countries

Neville Shack

ROBERT EDRIC
Winter Garden
169pp. André Deutsch. £8.95.
0 233 977562

G.E. ARMITAGE
A Season of Peace
191pp. Secker and Warburg. £8.50.
0 436 018098

The violent deaths of young people lend resonance to these two novels (by the same author, give or take a pseudonym); a brooding sense of mortality and waste is common to both, though it works in quite different ways and to different effect. *Winter Garden* sets its collection of unwholesome characters in an English seaside resort, emphatically off-season, as Christmas approaches; the title's ironic promise of frolics topped with a glacial veneer comes true. Alice Protheroe and her bovine police-sergeant husband, Norman, run a guest house, mostly frequented by dubious entertainers. The most striking feature of the town is its aura of human failure; a winter pantomime season has very little to offer other than seediness and regrets after happier days, shades of Ken Dodd in summertime, and the Protheroe household seems to give a domestic face to this talent deficit. Among its guests is a repertory of fifth-raters: Rita, the pouting stripper, quick to defend her vocation; Derek and Veronica Priestley, a couple of very ordinary conjurers, and Mighty Morgan, Midget Man of Muscle, who is pure noisiousness. Christmas cheer will have a lot to overcome.

One secret in the midst of so many banalities, a special dispatch from Greenland, concerns the missing girl, Tracey Morton. Only the casually [illegible] know the grisly truth about her death and the fact that she lies undiscovered for weeks near Norman's allotment. Her family are ghastly enough to provoke any self-respecting fourteen-year-old to run away; an easy explanation in the town for her disappearance. So the whodunnit twist to the story does not get ready licence on the ground. The search for clues, when conducted by heavy, plodding Norman, sinks any mystery or sharp detective elements. Instead, everyone, the backdrop and the crime itself are of a piece, achingly down-beat. Alice, who comes closest to being at all canny, feels vaguely discomfited by the whole incident from the outset. Being Norman's wife and landlady to her motley crew are punishments enough without having to bear the burden of too much intuition.

Characteristically, the waves lapping against the harbour wall are dirty; a solitary angler stands there, prone to cold but not to the chance of catching fish. Civic associations like the Friends of the Police Society demonstrate nothing but the absence of community. The remorseless mood sustains itself, while reality is depicted in gaudy detail as a seaside postcard. Dealing in very traditional English clichés, a grimy version too far gone even for soap opera treatment, the story works best when its humour is deadpan rather than when it lays on a macabre boom to emphasize the parody. Edric's touch can certainly be deft as his cartoon-like types disgrace themselves with predictable absurdity.

In *A Season of Peace* three individual deaths, spread over decades, exercise the narrator's conscience; each of them is enigmatic in its way, and the questions posed do not necessarily find straightforward resolution. Shifting backwards and forwards in time, he tells of his father's fatal military accident after the First World War, [illegible] community during and just after the Second World War, and of his own son, a soldier blown up by a booby-trapped car in Londonderry.

Cable Point, the village where the narrator helps to install an anti-aircraft battery in wartime, conjures soft-focus prose from his memory. It is as if this impressionable young man had entered a foreign country, to become somehow entranced by the strange symbolism. The landscape's long horizons suggest emptiness; a powerful image is of the detached embryo of a shark being handled by some local children on the beach, birds screaming all around. And it is the children who become active acquaintances, but always checked by an apparent tentativeness on both sides. Mary, a girl whose father returns sadly broken from being a prisoner-of-war, befriends the narrator. The sepia tones encourage a belief in their unusual rapport.

Uncertainties nag throughout, though. The middle-aged man writing his first-person account finds himself still shocked by his son's fate, particularly where it touches on the hopelessness of strained relations in the family. Referring back to events at Cable Point, a mood combining resignation and muffled defiance enters again. Despite it, these two separate planes of experience fail to overlap satisfactorily for the purposes of the narrative, perhaps because the earlier one is far more evocative than the later. Oblique dialogue and description have, when set in the past, a power which seems to depreciate thirty years on.

The six novels shortlisted for this year's Booker McConnell Prize are *Illywhacker*, by Peter Carey; *The Battle of Pollocks Crossing*, by J. L. Carr; *The Bone People*, by Keri Hulme; *The Good Terrorist*, by Doris Lessing; *The Good Apprentice*, by Iris Murdoch; and [illegible]

Against the cold and the dark

Roz Kaveney

MAGGIE GEE
Light Years
350pp. Faber. £9.95.
0 571 13604 4

There are things it is hard to make new, emotional situations which have become clichés by being common parts of human life; moments of parting, recrimination and forgiveness, for example. To adopt an experimental approach to the novel is obviously appropriate when what is described is that which ordinary fiction finds difficult; the triumph of Maggie Gee's *Light Years* is that in it she applies a battery of fictional techniques similar to those in her more overtly radical earlier novels to precisely those subjects which more conventional novelists find easy, too easy. In any year, in almost any month, the presses turn out novels in which couples in the more fashionable parts of London split up over their incompatibilities, have affairs, lose parents and are reconciled. *Light Years* is distinguishable from such in few details of its plot, yet its moral atmosphere, its sheer feel are so out of the common run as to make it hard to remember that we have been here before.

Gee has made play before with the distancing effect which results from linking her main narrative to a stream of imagery that is entirely unrelated to it at any explicit level. In *The Burning Book*, this consisted of the rumours of war and memories of Hiroshima always at the ear of the family saga's narrator; here it is the silence of infinite space and the inhospitableness of even those fragments of solidity, the planets of the Solar System, that act as counterpoint to her narrative of separation. Occasionally this drifts into something more conventional, almost an example of the pathetic fallacy, but is infused with a parodic tone by being too close and obvious a link, as when Harold's claustrophobia on a cross-Channel ferry is juxtaposed with the "lethal yellow hothouse" of Venus. The discoveries of astronomy do eventually come to be an explicit metaphor; the minor parodic flirtations with the idea of their doing so prevent our making the connection too soon. The opposition of human microcosm and the stars is hardly original; what is new is the way in which the implicit metaphors are so fully present without swamping the narrative and the way interest in this counterpoint is sustained.

One factor in this is that while mankind in general, and Harold and Lottie, the estranged couple, in particular, are shown against a backdrop of stars, they are also shown surrounded by animals, a warmer aspect of the natural world, vulnerable, as the stars are not, to the consequences of human failing. The original quarrel focuses on a tamarin monkey which Lottie buys illegally as a present, and which dies of neglect as a result of their separation; it is when she and Harold independently make amends to its shade and visit the Small Mammal House in the Regents Park Zoo that they fall back into each other's arms. Lottie learns much, it is implied but never stated, from her observation of the sterile bondings of the zoo's gorillas. Harold sustains himself through his exile from her with readings from Victorian books of natural wonders. Again, a parodic tone creeps in and makes it possible for us to take this almost Victorian theme of the healing power of observation of the natural world seriously, by telling us we do not have to. Part of Gee's innovativeness is this offer to the reader of an illusory free will. In the end, what we are offered is a rhetorical freedom only; we will comply with the author's intentions if we are to enjoy the book as the artefact it is, and do so more willingly for the subversive seeming offer.

Unlike her gloomy earlier two novels, this one is gently comic. Lottie is rich and spoiled; Harold principled, lazy and feckless; neither of them is allowed to get away with much. Almost because the author is quite hard on them, we appreciate all the more the positive qualities and moments of triumph that she does allow them. It is because she is subject to so many minor indignities, because the narrator so observes her, that we are so delighted when Lottie takes a piece of effective direct action, retrieving at gun-point from a messy Somerstown flat the jewels stolen from her by her son's punk friend Smeggy. There are false notes to some of the humour; Lottie's attempt to forget Harold in bed takes the form of a tedious, sexually expert Franco-Swiss businessman, who is a little too ludicrously dreadful to be quite true; Harold gets off lightly with a shop assistant, with whom he has a somewhat pedagogic love affair that is allowed to be touching and warm as well as comically disastrous. At times, Maggie Gee's personal and political disapproval of women like Lottie contaminates the narrator's purely artistic, cultivated, comic disdain for her, raising, not entirely to the novel's advantage, the ultimately irrelevant question of whether we should be as glad as in the event we are about the eventual reconciliation, the couple playing piggy-back in the snow.

Apart from the sardonicism and the occasional discordant sourness, this is a genial, peopled book; Harold and Lottie's lives take place in a human world as well as the worlds of the stars and beasts. Gee has a particular gift for making vividly present characters who may only be glimpsed by the principals, but who teach them lessons; the two elderly lesbian gentlewomen who counsel Harold in a Bournemouth guest house, for example, have an important function, but are memorable walk-ons too. Foregrounded figures like Lottie's son Davey, or Harold's lover April, are socially and emotionally credible, have moments of dominating our sympathies, yet are kept on a tight leash, never stray from their job of supporting and supplementing the objects of our real attention.

This is so fine a novel because so completely a planned and crafted one, even when its events seem most contingent or haphazard, when its tones and concepts clash. This craft, and the book's posed philosophical view, pile up all of human possibility and perception as a barrier against the cold and the dark; the tamarin died of isolation and neglect and the middle-aged Harold and Lottie find they cannot afford to be apart. Maggie Gee's experimentalism is one which, also, refuses to be merely clever and cold.

A money-map of Sydney

Jill Neville

JESSICA ANDERSON
The Only Daughter
252pp. Viking. £8.95.
0 670 80431 2

The city of Sydney has not been depicted quite so exactly in any other novel of quality. In *The Only Daughter*, Jessica Anderson describes with Ordnance Survey precision, the walk over The Domain and through the Botanical Gardens by each of several characters locked in their secret hopes of a legacy (or proud refusal to indulge in such hopes). As if writing in braille for a blind tourist, she details the exact route from Wynyard station up the North Shore Line where the respectable families live.

This quietly clever novel is constructed with the skill of a fine cabinet-maker. And inside the cabinet lies the hero of the book: The Will. It belongs to Jack, who has arrived at that age of impotence when the sex game is replaced by the will game. With it he tantalizes his second wife and attempts to woo back his daughter, who, like many of her generation, disappeared to England in the 1950s.

Jack's first marriage to a merry slut produced two children, a son who stayed at home and became shrewd in life and in real estate, and Sylvia who "shot through" to London at the age of nineteen and who, twenty years later, decides to come back for a visit. The reverberations of her homecoming coincide with the imminent death of her father.

Naturally everyone thinks she has come back for the money. There are four children in the family, belonging to the second wife, which obliges the author to provide us with a family tree. There is the black sheep, Guy, a portrait of someone so endemically "not quite the full quid" that the resignation of both himself and his family is a settled fact. His attempts at mischief move things along a bit. A second son, Harry, is an old flame of Sylvia's, and though both are by now sexually pessimistic, they are obliged to accept their luck when the flame re-ignites.

Neither of the two other daughters is a stereotype, though both are housewives and mothers. In the course of the novel one of them discovers that her husband is a company crook. In the wildest scene she runs across connecting back-yards to stop her children coming home to face television cameras. This sudden outbreak of violence is, of course, all the more effective because it occurs among people of regular habits.

Jessica Anderson knows that money is as essential as blood and that anything is better than poverty. Her characters feel the deprivations of the latter mostly in an aesthetic sense: the piles of rubbish in doorways, the unlined curtains, etc, hence the enormous silent power of The Will. The dialogue, especially in the scenes between the sluttish first wife and her current man, contains idiosyncratic gems of observation, with the authentic Randwick race-course twang. Anderson's only blurred character is, unfortunately, a central one, the second wife, Greta. She is refined, stoic, nice; because of these qualities, her perfidious husband resents her and the reader cannot quite "see" her. The old man gets revenge in his will.

Mardi Gras music

Miranda Seymour

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR
The Violins of Saint-Jacques
148pp. Oxford University Press.
Paperback, £2.95.
0 19 281877 5

At latitude sixteen degrees on the sixty-first meridian, among the southerly French islands of the Caribbean Sea, no official soundings are given. It is almost, as Simon Winchester suggests in an appropriately romantic epilogue to this wildly romantic tale, as though the survey vessels had found more mystery there than they thought should prudently be explored.

It was here, just after the Second World War, that Patrick Leigh Fermor claimed to have heard the violins of Saint-Jacques, the music of the great Mardi Gras ball played just before Salpetrière erupted and the island vanished swiftly and entirely into the depths of the sea. Perhaps he did; a more likely origin for his tale is the terrible eruption of Mont Pelée in Martinique in 1902, an explosion which extinguished an entire town and killed 40,000 people. 42,000 die on Saint-Jacques as the narrator, Berthe de Rennes, then a pretty young governess, watches from a storm-tossed schooner.

In 1953, when the novel was first published, England was as sensuous and frivolous as a glass of flat beer. Leigh Fermor's fantasy of opulent luxury and unbridled decadence offered delectable escapism. Who, facing up to another mutton-bone-and-potato stew, would not wish to linger over the Senridans' Mardi Gras banquet, the hams and quails in aspic, the lobsters and crabs, the green and gold battalions of champagne bottles lying on banks of ice from Novia Scotia? The critics gushed with pleasure, and the readers bought.

The book has stood the test of time better than might be imagined. The heady extravagance with which Leigh Fermor enshrines every spoon and ladle in the Count de Senridan's home as the masterpiece of a Cellini or a de Lamerie does tend to call up the shades of Firbank or Oscar Wilde at his lushest, and the romantic web of elopements, cavorting lepers and beautiful lovesick boys prompts more smiles than sighs. But the pervasive charm remains.

christian bourgois
a édité
en 1985

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American notes

Christopher Hitchens

American drugstores sell soft drinks, sundries, cigarettes and miscellaneous goodies. What they do not sell are drugs, of the narcotic or prescription variety. American bookstores sell T-shirts, audio cassettes, videotapes, posters and souvenirs. They also sell a lot of instant romances and magazines. What they increasingly do not sell is books. One large chain of "bookstore" outlets is proud of the fact that 30 per cent of its stock is "non-book". In many quite large towns and communities, there is no bookshop worthy of the name. Jonathan Kozol, in his *Illiterate America*, points to several underlying trends, all of them projected to increase, which war against reading for pleasure or, indeed, reading at all.

Recently, Lewis Lapham, the editor of *Harper's*, convened a round-table of senior publishers to discuss the question "will books survive?" Mr Lapham has been impressed, visiting the annual jamboree of the American Booksellers' Association, "by the display of videocassettes, tape recordings, film posters, calendars, exercise manuals, scented candles and stuffed animals". In fact:

> At the end of an hour I wondered why nobody had offered me a chance to buy a twelve-day cruise to Tahiti, on which I would be sure to find, among other consummations devoutly to be wished for, firmer muscle tone, $4 million in stock market advice, a secure sexual identity, and incontrovertible proof that God exists and sometimes descends on California in the form of a seagull.

His symposium of leading publishers took a rather defensive line. Howard Kaminsky, Chief Executive of Random House, was positively touching in his defence of the industry from the charge of packaging and emulation:

> Last year Random House, including all its imprints, published about 500 titles. Obviously, these books varied greatly in their printings and in the size of their advertising and promotional budgets. For example, Random House is deeply committed to poetry – under our imprint we bring out four books of poetry a year. . .

Elisabeth Sifton of Viking took a more sombre view, saying that the "megabook" of the moment tended to absorb the advertising and promotion money – that serious non-fiction had an audience larger than it was reaching, and that "there will never be enough advertising money to tell people about these books, and booksellers are understandably hesitant to stock books that readers have never heard of".

It is objected by some of the more conscientious mass-market people, like William Edwards of B. Dalton, that the flood of "trash books" which does get distributed is not wholly depressing in its effect. Such books "pay the rent and provide the capital that allows us to carry other titles". Hillel Stavis, who runs Words Worth, an excellent independent shop on Harvard Square, makes a similar point about books that are more publicity events than publications. "Once the customers are there, there is a chance they might wander past the 7,000 copies of some trash novel and stumble upon Virgina Woolf or Joseph Conrad."

Arguably, the figures, as Elisabeth Sifton points out, are not so optimistic. The sale of serious books is at the same level in the United States as it was half a century ago. Given the great increase in population, this can only mean that literacy, properly understood, is on the decline. It would be surprising if this had nothing to do with the opportunism of publishers and booksellers, and with the tremendous and admitted collapse of back-lists in the major houses. Rather than attracting customers to bookshops and springing Virginia Woolf on them, the non-books and trash books may be the agents of Gresham's Law, or its literary analogue.

As I read through Mr Lapham's symposium, I realized that it was reminding me of something, and that there *is* a literary analogue to Gresham's Law. Then it came to me. If a publishing industry devotes half its time to market research, finds out what people "want" to read and then packages books for that presumed demand, it is following the dictates of The Organization for the Electronic Production of Homogenized Literary Works. OEPHLW was imagined by Italo Calvino (to whom, homage) in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. The headquarters of the organization were in New York.

* * *

Reviewing Kingsley Amis's *Stanley and the Women* in the *Wall Street Journal*, Hilton Kramer remarked rather dourly that, though the liberal and feminist consensus had not in the end succeeded in preventing its publication, they would probably see to it that the book didn't get reviewed. By the time this review appeared in print, it had been preceded by prominent notices in every major newspaper, and most major magazines, in the continental United States. The opinions varied ("a hate-novel against women" – *San Francisco Chronicle*; "Famous Amis" – *Vanity Fair*), but they did not vary according to the sex of the reviewer, though male writers were slightly more enthusiastic.

Dropping the allegation of misogyny as being last season's issue, many reviewers decided to call the book anti-Jewish instead. You would certainly not have known, from reading Michiko Kakutani's notice in the *New York Times*, that the madness of Stanley's son consists in his anti-semitic paranoia. Probably the fairest judgment came from Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, in the Sunday edition of the *Times*. She made a clever connection with the character of Margaret in *Lucky Jim* and observed that Amis is, if anything, becoming misanthropic. Where, now, are those who wrote in to say that *Stanley* would never play in America, was too British and had no modern appeal?

* * *

Norman Mailer's tenure at PEN, which has been rather tranquil up until now, is about to assume what the trade calls "a higher visibility". In January, American PEN hosts the forty-eighth International Congress of the Organization, the first held in New York for two decades, under the title, The Writer's Imagination and the Imagination of the State. Of this endeavour Mailer is quoted as saying, "One purpose of our conference will be to enhance relations rather than smash them", which will presumably come as a relief to some people. So will his assurance that, "We are not going to seek for invidious comparisons of governments", though I can't see what "invidia" has to do with the sort of "moral equivalence" comparisons that Mailer has made in the past.

In order to finance and to herald this conference, a series of readings by distinguished authors has been arranged to run throughout the autumn in New York. Saul Bellow and Eudora Welty formed the first pair, with William Buckley and John Irving, Susan Sontag and Kurt Vonnegut, Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe to come. Anticipation is already concentrated on the evening of November 12, when Mailer shares the podium with Gore Vidal. A subscription ticket for all these evenings costs $1,000, but no doubt accounts of them will leak out none the less. And the congress looks promising too, despite the prospectus which speaks of a time – our time – "when writers work in an ever more complex and technological world, facing pressing but often indefinable issues". The rubric goes on to speak of "the weight of our unanswered questions and the unfocused urgency of our times". Yes, yes, but what about the writers?

The Society of Authors' first five awards from the new Authors' Foundation are £2500 to Richard Holmes who is working on a life of Coleridge to be published by Hodder and Stoughton; £2500 to Barrie Pitt for the third volume of his trilogy, *The Crucible of War*, to be published by Cape; £1000 to Monica Furlong for a biography of Simone Weil to be published by Heinemann; £1000 to Selina Hastings for a biography of Rosamond Lehmann to be published by Collins and £1000 to John Ryle for a book about Brazil to be published by Chatto and Windus.

FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS of October 3, 1935, published a review by B. H. Liddell Hart of the first volume of Duff Cooper's Haig, *from which these extracts are taken:*

The tendency to turn military heroes into symbolical figures, until all reality is lost, has grown in the last generation. Englishmen were amused when they heard of the gigantic wooden statue of Hindenburg into which Germans drove nails to show their patriotic fervour. But since the War, with less excuse, this process of transfiguration has been manifested here – although not so single-mindedly. The figure of Haig has become enfolded in a dual legend. On the one hand there has grown the conventional picture of a great commander – farsighted, profound in reflection, quick of decision, unshakable in resolution, moved solely by a sense of duty. On the other hand, there is the picture of a soldier moulded to a different yet not less popular pattern – short-sighted, dull, slow, obstinate, and callous. . . .

Is there any way of reconciling such contrasting pictures, and of discovering the form which lies hidden behind them? Mr. Duff Cooper's "Haig" will not be much help in this endeavour. Perhaps too conscious of his role as the official biographer, the author is content to draw the conventional picture of a soldier without flaw. Its surface is too uniformly glazed to be convincing. It has the characteristic [illegible] giving some of its too scanty quotations from Haig's own letters, it never succeeds in bringing the man to life. . . . [This] biography is dull reading and historically unilluminating. . . . The campaign in France was so predominantly tactical that its history can hardly be understood unless one knows the history of tactical evolution. There are things which suggest Mr. Duff Cooper's unfamiliarity with the subject, despite his record of gallant service in the War and subsequent years at the War Office as one of the ministers responsible for the Army. The most important matter with which his present volume deals is the Battle of the Somme. . . . One of the few points on which he ventures a comment concerns the method of infantry advance: he says that, in face of the Army Commanders' preference for a steady advance in waves, Haig yielded his own desire for an advance by short rushes; he then remarks that there is no doubt that this method, "which is now universally adopted in training", would have been better. Although one may be inclined to agree with his view, it must be pointed out that it is a pre-War method which, far from being universally adopted now, has been strongly discouraged in training since the War. . . . The value of the book thus rests almost entirely in the extracts which it gives from Haig's own diary and letters. One would welcome far more than are reproduced, especially from the letters written when he was in [illegible] reveal a lividness of thought and expression which is most appealing; so far as they go, they cast doubt on that one of the two legendary pictures which paints Haig as "a stupid man" . . . . In the measure that we discount the charges of stupidity levied against Haig, the more we are led to look for the explanation of miscalculations in the most common cause – an excessive optimism in viewing a problem. It is a tendency to which commanders are particularly liable. A congenital pessimist would not command the confidence of his troops, or be likely to impose his will on the enemy. And the mean is hard to strike. That tendency in him, when conducting an offensive, has been admitted by some of his most intimate assistants: It has even been emphasized by the Official History. Yet his official biographer ignores it. Indeed, he goes further. For after quoting Sir John French's rash prophecy in January, 1915, that the War would be over by June, Mr. Duff Cooper goes on to state that "Haig entertained no such optimistic illusions". Yet in that very year Haig thrice made, in writing, predictions of early victory – in the spring he was sure that Germany would be yielding before the summer was out; in the summer he was sure that she could not go on after January; a little later, he shortened the predicted end and suggested that it might come before the winter even arrived. Here is most significant and cumulative evidence of an attitude of mind, such evidence [illegible]

Letters

Arts Council Subsidies

Sir, – I share Lorna Sage's bewilderment (Behind the lines, September 27) as to the precise meaning of the references to literature in the Arts Council's glossy brochure: "An Invitation to Invest in the Arts: A Great British Success Story". My name appears there in a sentence which reads "It is . . . writers like Salman Rushdie, Margaret Drabble, Buchi Emecheta and Martin Amis." What is? It is. If one looks back desperately through an entire page of text one finds that the subject of this curious bit of syntax is "the arts industry". Now, I have no objection to being part of the arts industry (though I don't much like the language) but I do object to the implication that I personally have been in some way subsidized or encouraged in my business activities by the Arts Council, and by the implication that the Arts Council takes seriously the business of subsidizing or "investing in" literature. It does not. Would that it did. But as it doesn't, it can hardly expect to win approval for its non-strategy by stringing together a randomly representative list of names and hoping that nobody will notice the utter lack of content or commitment in their declaration.

Writers do need help: I in the past have been helped by a timely award from the Society of Authors, by the interest and enthusiasm of my publishers and my agent, and by the valuable experience (and promotion) gained by lecturing for the British Council. And although I never received an Arts Council grant, in the past I went on several Writers' Tours for the Arts Council, tours which were instigated under the imaginative chairmanship of Angus Wilson, and which were stimulating to writers and audiences alike. These tours no longer take place in the form in which they were conceived (if indeed they now take place at all) and when I wrote to the Director of the Literature Panel a couple of years ago expressing my belief in their value, I didn't even get a reply. I have just wasted half an hour of my writing time trying to compose this letter, in protest against the taking of my name in vain. Some support, some subsidy, some investment. Unless the Arts Council can come up with a more positive approach towards literature, they might as well have the grace to stay silent, instead of implying that they are taking action when they are not, and have no known plans to do so.

MARGARET DRABBLE.
24 Heath Hurst Road, London NW3.

'Elizabeth and Alexandra'

Sir, – Kyril FitzLyon's review of my book *Elizabeth and Alexandra* (August 2) has just reached me. It is full of such oddities I feel I must correct them.

He writes there is no evidence for my belief that the Grand Duke of Hesse visited Russia in secret, "although there is some to the contrary". What of the formal deposition made in 1953 by the Crown Princess Cecelie: "If the view is still held today that such a visit never took place, I can assert from personal knowledge – the source is my late father-in-law [the Kaiser] – that this visit was already known in our circles at the time"? Or the statement of the Kaiser's stepson, Prince Ferdinand of Schoenaich Carolath, in 1966 confirming his stepfather's knowledge of the visit?

And what of Prince Dimitri Galytzin's statement on oath in 1965 that he had seen the Grand Duke of Hesse at Tsarskoe Selo in 1916?

Further, on FitzLyon asks a series of curious questions, among them, why did I say that Orthodox priests with urban parishes were celibate, "since Lambton refers to Rasputin, a married man with a family, as a monk"? My answer is so simple I am amazed FitzLyon is not aware of it: Orthodox priests with urban parishes were celibate while country priests were allowed to marry, and Rasputin was commonly referred to as a monk although he was not a consecrated priest.

FitzLyon also accuses me of describing absurdly improbable customs. Which ones? As far as I know, every custom I described was improbable but historically correct. This brings me to my final complaint, that a critic has no business suggesting without evidence that an author did not do his own research. I had no assistance of any kind, but as FitzLyon thought fit to make such a damaging guess I would like to make one myself, namely that he did not read the whole book, which is why he spent as much time writing about the blurb on the cover as he did of the contents.

ANTONY LAMBTON.
Villa Cetinale, Sovicille, Siena, Italy.

Deconstruction and the New Critics

Sir, – Michael Sprinker's claim, in his review of Michael Fischer's *Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference?* (September 20), that deconstruction diverges from the New Criticism "over the concept of organic form, and the confusion of poetic objects with natural objects that this concept entails for the New Criticism", is little better than academic folklore. It does not become the more true because would-be deconstructionists are fond of repeating it. In fact the New Critics were very insistent on the autonomy of the aesthetic construct and set their face very firmly against the "confusion" of which Sprinker speaks. "Organic form" has become something of a catch-all term, whose indiscriminate use can blur important distinctions – perhaps especially so in the case of the New Criticism. If the New Criticism has one overwhelmingly influential and definitive text it's Cleanth Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn*, yet I would deny quite categorically that it could be meaningfully characterized in such terms. If Michael Sprinker believes in patient and perspicacious inquiry he could not do better than begin with the New Critics, who may have their faults, but who are surely entitled to a more attentive reading than this.

DAVID MORSE.
University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton.

British Defence Policy

Sir, – Lawrence Freedman, with his great authority, should not stoop to misrepresentation. As one of the authors whom he lumps together (August 30) as having implied that "British defence policy over the past forty years has been an almost unmitigated disaster", I have never suggested anything of the kind. Having played a minor part at the formation of Nato, I thought then, and still maintain, that British membership in 1949 was right and justified.

But 1949 is not 1985. Britain is now a much lesser power, the European mainland, West and East, has changed almost beyond recognition, Soviet expansionism may not have vanished but has palpably altered course. The confrontation between the super-powers is different in scale, quality and axis.

Professor Freedman rightly holds that we who seek a reappraisal of British policy should establish a case. But it is no longer enough for those who support the status quo merely to project into the future a *post hoc* argument drawn from the forty years of "peace". They, too, should test their policy against the new conditions. This means explaining how an apparently indefinite prolongation of Britain's part in the present dangerous impasse will help in restoring our continent to coherence.

PETER JOHNSON.
Middle Corner Cottage, Hempton, Deddington, Oxfordshire.

Zanzibar Libraries

Sir, – John Ryle's article on the lost library of Zanzibar (September 13) was most entertaining, and certainly succeeded in a short space in conveying something of the atmosphere of Zanzibar, but by concentrating on the results of years of neglect, it failed to do justice to what is really going on. I have just returned from one of several consultancy visits to Zanzibar on the presentation of historical records and documents and feel that the *TLS* would not wish to perpetuate the idea, romantic as it may be, that the Zanzibar Government is unaware of the wealth of documentary material it possesses or that this material is inaccessible. The non-Africana section of the English Club library is largely intact, and so are the libraries at the Museum and the Archives, which also incorporate the former Secretariat library. Since Esmond Bradley Martin's *Zanzibar: Tradition and revolution*, to which Ryle refers, was published in 1978, the government, in particular the Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports, has initiated many changes, in which the President, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, has taken an active interest. The Archives, for instance, is now run by a London-trained archivist, it is air-conditioned, all the nineteenth-century records have been arranged and listed, and a major programme of accessioning and listing twentieth-century government records is under way. Zanzibar is again becoming a place where research is fostered.

ANNE THURSTON.
Institute of Commonwealth Studies and School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University of London, 27–8 Russell Square, London WC1.

'London under London'

Sir, – I hope your caption to the illustration on p 941 of the *TLS* for August 30 is not indicative of the overall accuracy of *London under London* by Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman, from which the drawing was taken.

The water-powered pumping engine of Peter Morice (or Morris but never Moris, to my knowledge) is generally reckoned to have been installed at London Bridge in 1582 rather than 1552. No illustrations of the machine as it was built survive, although there is a less than detailed drawing of it in the third edition of John Bate's *The Mysteries of Nature and Art* of 1635. The Morice machine was destroyed, or very nearly so, in the Great Fire of 1666, although subsequently it was repaired and seems to have struggled on until the beginning of the eighteenth century, by which time it was totally inadequate as a supplier of water.

Your illustration depicts the installation of George Sorocold, a man held in some esteem as an "erector of water-works" and referred to as "the great English engineer". Just before and after 1700 he installed water-powered pumping plants in several places in England, and was employed to re-design completely and enlarge the London Bridge machine about 1701 or 1702. The illustration is not by Sorocold, however. It is by Henry Beighton and was first published in 1731 in Volume 37 of the *Philosophical Transactions*.

N. A. F. SMITH.
Department of Humanities, Imperial College of Science and Technology, London SW7.

'Three Hours after Marriage'

Sir, – Oxford ACT are mistaken in asserting that their production of *Three Hours after Marriage* is the first since 1717 (reported by Randall Stevenson, Commentary, September 6). This play was staged by Leeds University Union Theatre Group, under my direction, in 1978. There was also, I believe, a production at Liverpool a year or two earlier.

JOHN SMURTHWAITE.
31 Newton Garth, Leeds.

'The Tradition of Return'

Sir, – I would like to thank A. K. Thorlby for his thoughtful essay on my book, *The Tradition of Return: The Implicit history of modern literature* (August 2) and to answer an implied question in his review.

Princeton University Press asked me to provide translations of material in foreign languages – even the title is a translation (the book is still called *Nostos* by its friends). Where existing translations were inadequate, as with *La Nouvelle Hélоïse* and *Salammbô*, I made my own. Where standard translations were available, I quoted them. In the case of Nietzsche, this meant, for the most part, Walter Kaufmann's translations, some of which exist, to my knowledge, only in the editions to which Mr Thorlby objects.

JEFFREY M. PERL.
Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027.

Basil Blackwell

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THE *TLS*/CHELTENHAM PRIZE: THE WINNING POEMS

Travellers' Tale

When the co-pilot woke up
(The six-seat Cessna joggling on the uplift from the hot sand dunes)
And started scrabbling at the window
(They had followed the coast for hours, and passenger Ian Millberrow
Could see the Indian Ocean crinkle white on coral,
Puffs of palms, and every so often
A hotel's turquoise swimming pool, although
The last of these was miles behind now),
When he woke up,
When he seemed to be wiping the window to see,
Or somehow to get out,
And the hunched pilot eased the stick and started the approach,
Or a dive, or evasive action – it was Jennifer Hale's first flight
In a plane that size, and she couldn't tell,
But she saw the altimeter unscrewing and unscrewing
And unscrewing as her ears blocked and the engine pitch went up and up,
And they could all see almost the individual fish a dhow was catching,
Well,
At that moment, when the co-pilot woke up, Professor Modikwe thought:
I've had a good holiday. This death is clean and quick.
Now more than ever it seems okay to die.
And Mrs Modikwe, by some electrical activity in her brain,
Seeing snapshots of their son Julian, and Green Lawn High School
Commemoration parades,
Thought: *This is not a moment when my behaviour is something to be proud of.*

JONATHAN TAYLOR

The Achievers

Behind a front-door
stairs, without turn, or landing, run to a back-attic
in one flight; breath and breathing
go diagonally, as if
hand in hand
through the house, red stair-carpet and hall lamp
separating two walls that build
like stanchions
of light
into the roof.

This is Jesmond Zamyatin made
in his *Islanders* a Russian jest of –
shifting the tedium of yards, as he oversaw
the construction, and constitution, of Russian ships.
1916, the pole of the year: its ice.
A dithering of Ocean; the Czar's icebreakers
furrow dark water.

In a front-room
siding the stairs, a boy fingers
a flute, and a young woman, circumscribed
in a circle of light, shed from a lamp like a green bonnet,
stands a little
to the side, back a bit,
and bends above him to read the notes,
their closed dots and fins
silently filling the page

as stairs
fill the house, climbing
a magnitude
of soft despair
and achievement, coming on.

JON SILKIN

The Allotment

In the mornings I wake, walk and dig.
In the afternoons I cut and dry;
Evenings I consume.
I am the one with caked root hands
And dry black nails.
This is the muck I was born from, into;
It is here that I prepare the ground
To take me whole, so I can be the soil
That dries on your youthful,
Burrowing fingers.

This is the open, naked girl
Ripped from a magazine left
On the allotments. My digging
Was delayed by rain, I watched her
Mouth fill up with water,
And her legs; funnelling.
She held a look of ecstasy
As I spaded her into the mud;
Fuel for later.

I like to get here early
Before the others come.
The dogs come first and then
The hollow rumbling of empty barrows.
By the time they arrive
My patch is like a jungle.
I have soil as rich as blood.
It is slicking sweetly through my veins.

This is the child who's been
Missing since . . . .
This is the child who was
Beaten lifeless, left in a quiet river,
Washed up onto the edge of the soil.
I had seen her running away
With the man whose cold hands
Were printed on her neck when I found her.
Within a day she was part of my soil.
Her crop was young, fresh and green.
For a whole day the allotment
Burst and was cut.
The girl rose through my tending,
Then there was nothing – barren.

I am the man who can tame the earth,
Can make it rise through
My little patch of ground.
My spade is charmed.
Every dusk I wheel a mountain home,
Of skin and bones.
Flesh for the sleepless.
Smokeless fuel for the quiet man's night.

MICHAEL SYMMONS ROBERTS

Well over 3,000 poems were entered for the 1985 *TLS*/Cheltenham Festival of Literature Poetry Competition. The judges – the poets Patricia Beer and Douglas Dunn, the novelist Isabel Colegate, and, from the *TLS*, the Editor, Jeremy Treglown and Poetry Editor, Alan Jenkins – had relatively little difficulty in narrowing the field of anonymous entries to about 100 poems, and then to seven. But they found it hard to agree on an order within the final short list, and their verdict in the end came from a numerical vote, each judge giving seven points to the poem he or she thought best, six to the second-best, and so on.

When the winners' names were revealed, it emerged that one poet, Stephen Romer, who lives in Paris, had come through not only in second place (winning £250) with "Wellingtonia", but also among the runners-up with "Entre Chien et Loup". This poem was therefore not given a prize, but will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *TLS*.

The first prize of £500 was won by "Travellers' Tale", by Jonathan Taylor, a Hampshire schoolteacher who is a member of a writing group run by Lawrence Lerner in Brighton. "House of Moon", by D.W. Hartnett, came third (£100). Mr Hartnett's collection *A Signalled Love* was published this August by the Anvil Press, and like both Stephen Romer and the well-established Jon Silkin, whose "The Achievers" wins one of the three prizes of £50, he has already had work published in the *TLS* and elsewhere.

The other £50 prizes went to Nick Conrad, of Swanton, Ohio, for "At Sleepy River Campground", and Michael Symmons Roberts, a twenty-one-year-old student who lives in Cheltenham, for "The Allotment" – his first poem to be published.

The prizes – donated by the *TLS* – will be presented by all five judges at a buffet lunch at the Town Hall, Cheltenham, at 12.30 on Sunday, October 6 (tickets £3).

Next year, the judging of the competition is to be opened out. In addition to a panel of judges making a decision along the same lines as this year, readers of the *TLS* will be enabled to vote by postal ballot on a selection from the 1986 entry, to be published in the paper well before the Festival begins. Equal prizes will be awarded to the first three poems chosen by the readers, and by the judges.

Wellingtonia

From his armchair in the home counties
Grandpa followed our Asian journeys
with an atlas of the world and supplement
of postcards, hasty and irregular,
from Delhi, Cochin, the southern tip of India.
He plotted the route with eccentric care
as if he'd travelled it. But when I came back
taller, with the deferent condescension
of the barely adult, he missed the boy
back in the kitchen playing Snap with Ada.

Ada ruled the larder. My life was pale yellow.
There was bread and butter, Gentleman's Relish,
a drawer of knives, a row of yellow bells,
two sisters and a blue Wellingtonia.
We gathered up dead needles by the handful,
but the tree renews them, said grandpa,
full of facts and detail. In the War
he drilled his soldiers on the tennis lawn
or so my mother said. I liked to linger
in the shadow of a pine green corridor.

I felt the velvet drapes and smelt the turpentine
but loathed the girlish shoes I had to pose in.
Granny was an upstairs painter, her studio
an attic. Downstairs was dark, the conversation
social: families, marriages, property, sport.
Once under drugs, granny rose from her ground-floor
death bed and with uncontrollable strength
began to mount the stairs. She was found
in the small hours, more than half-way up
scrabbling at a window as if for air.

She spurned her nurses, dreading helplessness.
Prodigal of flowers, her lacquered garlands
live with us on tables, beds and chairs.
A morning fire below the smoky mirror,
a mixture of lights, tonic in a glass
can reassemble her to me. The Wellingtonia
dropped its skirts of branch almost to the lawn,
extinguishing the grown-up room in shadow.
The turn in the corridor was always dark.
Grandpa packed her portrait and moved on.

One day, he found he shared an interest
with his otherwise disappointing grandson
– bookish, secretive, no good at sports –
and that was pipe-smoking. We would light up
together, a rosewood briar and a meerschaum,
breathe in with the little pop of fishes,
tamp the tobacco down and move off slowly
crunching round the gravel drive. I still
have the last of the Three Nuns and cleaners.
My other achievement was a motorcycle.

STEPHEN ROMER

House of Moon

In the house of moon he is still eating breakfast
In vest and braces, bent above the steam
From his porridge's whorled andromeda of sugar –
And, for the child who laughs, stroking white bristles
'I've never seen anything like it in all my puff'.

In the house of moon she is still lighting the fire
Knelt at its pyre of wood and crumpled paper,
Her fingers splaying the flames like orange velvet –
And, for the child who gasps, fingering plaits
That flick her waist: 'It doesn't hurt anymore'.

House of moon you begin where the landing ends
Or up in the attic or underneath the stairs.
Your doors are always open and never lead me
To the whispering blind man shrunk in his last ward
Or the crematorium drapes drawn on her coffin.

D. W. HARTNETT

At Sleepy River Campground

Here amongst the trailers, Elwood,
crude swastika on his arm, sits in a folding chair
and smokes a ten-inch cigar. He is ready
for his third dosage of the day. No one
can tell his hairstyle has been his for only
a week, or that he had a beard yesterday.

Their used trailer is as old as his haircut.
From his folding chair he issues cordial greetings
in a faultless imitation of a good
neighbour. In the trailer, out of sight, in shadow,
almost fainting from the smell of the mildewed canvas,
his mother observes his little trial run.

After only a week, she is practised
at discreetly appearing whenever his greetings
bring to his side a talkative passer-by.
Allowed only so much stimulation,
all his conversations must be managed,
so she keeps them to fifteen minutes, no more.

At ten, she injects an anecdote
that highlights his hysteria, then watches
the onset in their guest of an urge to ambulate
which reveals itself within a minute
in a symptomatic pacing back and forth.
His goodbye seems mannered to the retreating guest.

In the first five minutes, before his mother
has taken charge, a guest is impressed by Elwood's
percipient glance which delivers up
the guest's age, home-town, and career. While his visitor
praises his intuition, Elwood watches the firewheel
on his arm spin round faster and faster.

NICK CONRAD

COMMENTARY

The life of the land

Marcia Pointon

Roderic O'Conor
Barbican Art Gallery, until November 3

Somerset Maugham, who knew Roderic O'Conor in Paris in the early years of this century, wrote that his studio "gave one the impression of abject poverty". His self-portrait of 1910 (one of three in the exhibition) shows a mysterious faceless figure, standing erect, heels together, apparently dressed in a dark suit and white collar in an interior that remains almost monochrome despite the expanse of window that frames the artist. He stretches out an arm in a decisive gesture towards a canvas that tells us just about as much as the canvas that blocks the gaze in Velázquez's "Las Meninas". It is a gesture of extreme ambiguity; he could be a military man, a conductor or a court room official.

O'Conor's studio may or may not have looked poverty-stricken but his father was High Sheriff of the County of Roscommon and he was a member of one of the most famous of ancient Irish families. Educated at Ampleforth College by Benedictine monks and at art schools in Dublin and Antwerp, he arrived in Paris as a student some time before 1888 when he signed up in the atelier of Carolus Duran. He appears not to have returned to Ireland until 1893, when he attended his father's funeral and came into a sizeable estate. His working life was spent in Grez-sur-Loing (to the west of Barbizon), in and around Paris and in Pont-Aven.

As a close friend of Gauguin, O'Conor has never disappeared entirely from view but, as this exhibition demonstrates, the posthumous fame of one flamboyant individual can often serve to obscure other deserving figures within the group. He belonged to a circle that included French, English, Irish and American artists. While there are interesting similarities in technique and in subject-matter between O'Conor on the one hand and Gauguin and Van Gogh on the other, the solid pictorial achievement of O'Conor disposes once and for all of any need for him to be tagged on to the coat-tails of his better-known contemporaries.

"L'Approche de Lezaven" of 1894, with its tonally complex pink path ruptured by the vertical segments of tree-trunks, immediately invokes Gauguin's work. The strikingly inventive technique of establishing mass and volume by the use of stripes of contrasting colour in heavy impasto (reds and greens, oranges and blues) like the heavily exaggerated recession and wild outlines of trees and bushes, is very reminiscent of Van Gogh. But O'Conor's achievement remains a distinctive one. Apart from the occasional painting like "Nude Bathing", which the catalogue compares with Munch but which might as appropriately be set alongside Puvis de Chavannes, there is little of the symbolist in his work. Nor, for all the predominance of landscape motifs, is there anywhere (except possibly in the etchings) any of Van Gogh's painful engagement with his environment.

In his catalogue (*Roderic O'Conor*. 120pp. Barbican Art Gallery. £6.95. 0 9463 7211 X), Roy Johnston says of O'Conor that "he continually sought the most appropriate means above all others to *express* his subject, and in this way he may be said to have adopted the purist painter's approach". In fact it is Courbet above all whose example is consistently evident in this exhibition. But to describe O'Conor thus is to arrive at precisely the same problems as we face if we accept as a definition Maxime Du Camp's remark that Courbet painted "comme on cire des bottes". Although O'Conor exhibits a variety of technique, ranging from the paint squeezed out of the tube in stripes and left to stand in relief to the more fluid and broken-down surfaces of his later work, he typically creates a surface which may incorporate the application of thick areas of pigment with a palette knife, a calligraphy in which liquid paint applied with a brush produces outline, and also the powerful marshalling of the interstices of ground left clearly exposed.

The effect from walking round this show is of a fundamentally sensuous artist. The decisive and at times defiant colour range in the rich display of canvases at this first ever major exhibition is seductive. However, the nagging questions remain. In "Une Jeune Bretonne" of 1903, the green and red stripes leak up from the neck over the jawbone and lower cheek but this boldness of technique serves to reaffirm rather than disturb the essential stillness and timelessness of the centrally placed head framed by white collar and coif. With the exception of "Une Jeune Bretonne" and "La Fille qui rit" (a Frans Hals-inspired head), O'Conor's peasant women have no faces. Poised between daylight and dusk against a tonally controlled but featureless background, their heads covered, discreet three-quarter views, their hands occupied with something – we are never told what – these women are robbed of the context that even Millet allows them, denied footwear and any suggestion of an occupation. We also see these women in black-and-white postcards where they appear about their business, single entities in a banal townscape. O'Conor transforms them into universal abstractions of Nature. As with his nudes who voluptuously wallow in foaming seas by rocky landscapes (visual metaphors wearily inherited from Courbet) the very sensuousness of the execution negates their particularity and universalizes their existence out of meaning.

O'Conor lived most of his life in hotels. He had a monthly allowance from his father and, after the latter's death, rents from tenant farmers on the Roscommon estate. There is, of course, no reason why someone whose income derived from the tenant farmers of one country should know or become concerned with the life of the land in another country. But there is a need to evacuate the actual and the particular from the image, and the figure in the painting entitled "Girl Mending" might well be filing her nails. The clearly separate categories for uninhabited landscapes and for rustic figure subjects, appear to show a process of control and discipline that is in striking contrast to the often frustrated attempts of Gauguin and Van Gogh to engage with their environments.

Perhaps O'Conor is at his best with still lifes (one from Roger Fry's collection is a particularly good example) and with the essentially urban and contemporary figure paintings he executed in his studio in the rue Cherche Midi in Paris. "Woman reading, sitting on a green divan" of 1924 is frankly voyeuristic and erotic. The intimacy of the scene is established by the softly diffused lighting, the comforting embrace of the settee and the feet hidden from view. The woman, engrossed in her book, round-shouldered, wears a slip, stockings and hat. A fraction of thigh is exposed above the stocking top. The painful contrast between this plenitude of this presentation and the defiant disjuncture between body and clothing in Gwen John's "The Bare Shoulder" which hangs downstairs in a parallel exhibition is striking.

Roderic O'Conor, "Self-Portrait", 1903(?); from the exhibition reviewed here.

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The nub of feeling

Frances Spalding

Howard Hodgkin
Whitechapel Art Gallery, until November 3

Howard Hodgkin Prints
Tate Gallery, until December 1

Howard Hodgkin's paintings are both easy and tough. They saturate the eye with colour, offering immediate sensuous appeal. But in that each hue enhances, steadies or wars against its neighbour, they also display a testing consideration on the part of the artist. Every inch of the picture surface retains its holding power; every mark, however zestful or swiftly made, is the product of deliberation. Even his more intimate pictures never lack formal and emotional density. One Howard Hodgkin is a challenging visual event. *En masse*, as in this show which repeats and supplements his 1984 Venice Biennale presentation, the effect is celebratory, aptly so as it marks the re-opening of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, renovated and extended by the architects Colquhoun and Miller. The elegant white interior spaces are deliberately unobtrusive. What detail can be found is nicely suggestive, in its asceticism, of both high-tech and the Arts and Crafts style of the building's exterior. Paintings and setting complement each other and share one underlying assumption – that everything extraneous to their purpose must be ruthlessly excised.

This ruthlessness, in Hodgkin's case, reduces his means to the minimum but never becomes schematic. On the contrary, his most evocative paintings are often the least strained. In "Venice, Evening", which consists solely of a dark green rectangle surrounded by a double border of red, Hodgkin allows the paint to do the work: gold peeps intermittently through the red like light flickering on stone; the heat and richness of the architecture are evoked by the sumptuous framing device, while the green recedes into darkness, its surface lit by transparent streaks and punctuated by a single trail of red. Similar inflections of mark and hue animate his prints which, as Richard Morphet remarks in his exhibition catalogue (*Howard Hodgkin Prints 1977–1983*. 60pp. Tate Gallery. £4.95. 0 94659 30 3), more and more approach the flexibility found in Hodgkin's paintings. Not that this is very easy to perceive at the Tate, where twenty-five of Hodgkin's prints, oppressively framed, are at times obscured by reflections from the low ceiling lights.

In conversation with David Sylvester, Hodgkin admired "a marvellous sentimental remark" of Muriel Spark's, "where she says for an artist time can always be regained". The passage he was referring to reads "time is redeemed, nothing is lost and wonders never cease", which nicely evokes what Hodgkin sets out to do. His paintings attempt to reclaim momentary experience, not the particularities of a scene but its emotional reality. The experience is often a social one, inclined either towards pleasure, as in his seductive "Waking Up in Naples", or a reminder of pain, as in "Reading the Letter". Often the setting provides the starting point for the patterning of shape and colour which, in an oblique and non-illustrational way, re-awakens the original nub of feeling. The wonder of it is that after a long period, and often substantial revision of the picture's ingredients, the result seems spontaneous and is vibrantly expressive, though its starting point is obscured.

What hints remain do not disturb the challenging autonomy of his art. His bold marks, which are calculated but unselfconscious, and rich colour make his paintings intensely pleasurable. But the often-made comparison with Matisse is a telling one, reminding us of other levels of thought and feeling that Hodgkin seems only now and then to tap. The privacy on which his art insists is, however, becoming less insistent as his style in recent years has relaxed. An admiration for Degas has increased his search for the "evasiveness of reality", that "glancing, slightly dematerialized quality" which is "evanescent, frail and difficult to establish". This interest has helped dispel a too great rigidity of format, and the recent "Souvenirs", the largest and most breathing painting in this exhibition, shows Hodgkin at his elusive best.

COMMENTARY

Patriarchal problems

Peter Kemp

LEV TOLSTOY
The Light Shines in Darkness
Radio 3
AUGUST STRINDBERG
The Father
BBC2

Tolstoy's unfinished play, *The Light Shines in Darkness* – given its first-ever production on Radio 3 – turned out to have a surprising amount in common with Strindberg's *The Father*, transmitted on BBC2 the same evening. Fraught fathers, fickle daughters, antagonized wives and equivocating ecclesiastics feature prominently in both works. Divisions cleave each play, too: in Strindberg's case, between male and female; in Tolstoy's, between those who take Christianity seriously and those who don't.

Almost openly autobiographical, *The Light Shines in Darkness* depicts the repercussions of a resolve by Nikolai, the head of a wealthy Russian family, to follow Christ and give away all he has. Registering the consternation this causes among those comfortably embedded in affluent complacency, the opening scenes have a cutting comic edge. First-rate performances on Radio 3 – especially Margaret Courtenay's imperiously vexed sister-in-law – get things off to a vigorous start as a world of privilege, Chopin, leisure, charm and exploitation is bombarded with the more inconvenient directives of the Gospels.

Among the targets of Nikolai's reproof is art, and, practising what it gives him scope to preach, the play increasingly pulls away from drama to doctrine. Homilies from Nikolai convert some of the scenes to sermonizing. Presentation of the play's regenerate characters has an icon-like flatness, too: as with Boris, the ardent young aristocrat who, becoming Nikolai's disciple and the proponent of a beatific brand of pacifism, disconcerts the military authorities with his insistence that life is "so joyously simple".

Tolstoy's artistic conscience – never entirely stifled – compels him to show that things aren't quite so ecstatically uncomplicated. Complexity, filled out by his uncrushable imaginative insights, keeps breaking through the play's pious diagrams with reminders of life's problematic predicaments and the unruly muddle of human motivation. Nikolai's wife, for instance – played with tense subtlety by Gemma Jones – is a convincingly equivocal figure, caught between her desire to do well for her family and recognition of the force of some of her husband's arguments. Angry both at herself and him, she admits, "I want to blame him for making me feel guilty". No such intricacy is discernible in the play's prophet-protagonist. Though pushed from certainty to doubt, Nikolai remains a mouthpiece rather than a person – something Robert Stephens's familiar verbal routine of nasal drawlings, near-brayings, and heavily plosive utterances does nothing to disguise. None the less, this belated première is a coup for Radio 3. *The Light Shines in Darkness* – it's triumphantly shown – is an illuminating specimen of Tolstoy's final phase, where propaganda sporadically succeeds in deviating into drama.

The Father is another work that seems part-drama, part-discourse on the author's obsessions. As Kenneth Ives's brooding production brings out strongly, the play is both about a man suffering from sexual paranoia and written by one who was. This generates its energy and inconsistencies. Doing justice to the former are acrid, smouldering performances from Colin Blakely and Dorothy Tutin. As the marital despot losing his grip, Blakely never slackens his hold on the role of the Captain. Each loosening of the man's emotional and psychological control is matched – with horrible authenticity – by an increase of physical clenching: jaw clamped, eyes fixed, arms rigid. Gliding baitingly and balefully round him, Dorothy Tutin's Laura – her face a mask shaped by pressures of their marriage – makes a softly lethal antagonist. Missing no nuance of poisoned suggestion or vicious ingenuity, her performance keeps reminding you of the play's twisted affinities with *Othello* as, like some bizarre amalgam of Desdemona and Iago, Laura – who has nightmares about being strangled – drops bacillus-like hints of infidelity into the imagination of her soldier-husband until he's inflamed into dementia and violence.

Other characters in the piece – twitched in contrary directions by Strindberg's paranoia – can seem so full of contradictory responses as to be near-schizophrenic. Edward Fox's rendering of the Doctor more or less abandons any semblance of coherence, settling for a weary-sounding, almost indifferent elocution of the lines. Irene Handl does better as the Nurse, bringing credibility to the vacillating, muddle-headed figure who incorporates Strindberg's mixed feelings about the maternal. Giving atmospheric unity to it all is an impressively oppressive set – cluttered, sombre, claustrophobic – by Tim Harvey.

Movie-talk

John Butt

MANUEL PUIG
Kiss of the Spider Woman
Bush Theatre

Although long suppressed in Argentina, its author's native country, Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* has been a great international success, first as a novel translated into numerous languages, then as a play (which ran for three years in Brazil), and recently as a film which has become something of a cult in the United States.

The production at the Bush Theatre, of Puig's script, translated by Allan Baker, with Simon Callow as Molina and Mark Rylance as Valentin, is touching and funny in the right combination, an impressive achievement. The play is set in a Buenos Aires prison, in a filthy cell shared by a "freedom fighter" and a homosexual sentenced to eight years for corrupting a minor. The production is perhaps rather less sympathetic towards the freedom fighter than is the novel, and the play reminds us that people like Valentin did their bit to give us Vedela and Galtieri. For all his febrile idealism, books and theories, Valentin is in every way an emotional dwarf alongside his cell-mate Molina, an uneducated gay who understands nothing of Marxist politics, history, books and ideas, and is baffled by Valentin's abstract feminism (Molina loves women so much that he wants to be one), but is shown to be much more at ease with the detail of life than the impatient and unbalanced Valentin.

Molina entertains the revolutionary by retelling the story of the B movies he has seen. It is something of a mystery why these film scripts are so engaging in both the novel and the play. One reason is that Puig is a genius at representing living speech: there is little dialogue in his books, but his characters chatter with a picturesque fluency which makes his work quite unlike anything else in the modern Hispanic novel, except, perhaps, Cabrera Infante at his best. The other reason is that the cheap melodrama in the films, the tears, betrayals and reconciliations, contrast favourably with the revolutionary's intolerance of such bourgeois sloppiness, so that the rubbish which Molina loves comes to symbolize human imagination and feeling. Molina expresses his own love of life through his re-telling of the plots. He can remember the dress and jewellery of a particular heroine, her exact words, the shape of her room – and if he can't, he supplies it from invention. His gift for immersing himself in recollected or imagined worlds means that he is not imprisoned even in jail; he carries most of what he needs with him. But Valentin has to discover, through missing his girlfriend and in his seduction by Molina, that his own resourcefulness is limited, his dependence on his comrades and on human kindness total, his aims confused and his toughness a machista pose. He learns humanity in Molina's bed, after gradually getting caught up in his version of the films which he himself despises.

It is not very clear in the play whether Molina really does betray Valentin's comrades to the authorities. The governor enlists him to serve Valentin poisoned food in order to break the latter so that he will reveal the whereabouts of the other guerrilleros. This plan backfires because Molina falls in love – though at the Bush the voices-over are too inaudible at the moment when Molina is freed for one to be absolutely sure which way he turns. But it hardly matters. The emotional and physical bond between this ill-matched couple has drawn so tight that it isn't possible to believe in Molina's cynicism. Despite this, Puig has been criticized by militant gays for not portraying homosexuals in a heroic light. In the October issue of *Index on Censorship* Puig rebuts the charge, insisting that he shows gays as unexceptional human beings, in this case gentle and muddled, but at the same time courageous and loving.

Puig's characters are often completely unheroic: uneducated, apparently vacuous, their minds centred on fashion and films and innocent of philosophy and theories, but unshakeable in their lack of illusions about life. Molina is the most famous of them, and Simon Callow beautifully captures his businesslike tenderness, charm and breathless excitement about his relationship with his unhappy friend. Mark Rylance's Valentin, rigid, immature and frightened, exasperating at first, and then lovable under Molina's influence, is a perfect contrast. Both performances are passionate and skilled. This version of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is directed by Simon Stokes with sensitivity and economy. It is satisfying to think that Puig, so long unknown in the English-speaking world, has at last attracted the attention of good translators and real professionals.

Country matters

Patricia Craig

FLORA THOMPSON
Lark Rise
Adapted by Keith Dewhurst
Almeida Theatre

"Poverty's no disgrace, but 'tis a great inconvenience": this catch-phrase was rife in the Oxfordshire hamlet of Juniper Hill when Flora Thompson was growing up there in the 1880s, and observing the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the Enclosure Acts, which left a lot of country people worse off than they had been. There was, however, a good deal to relish at this moment of transition, while many of the older country ways and values persisted, in spite of impending social change. Flora Thompson, when she came to look back, didn't include either undue nostalgia or criticism in her approach; her reminiscences are factual, decorative, subtle and full of wry understanding of people's foibles.

Since it is basically social history, though with a personal element to enliven it, *Lark Rise* isn't altogether an obvious contender for dramatization – no plot, no strong action, not too much in the way of rowdy comedy. Keith Dewhurst's adaptation, which was first staged at the Contact in 1978, makes the most of the aphoristic sayings, the domestic and farming routines and the vivid details in which the book abounds. Certain illustrative incidents are point up the absence of a narrative thread. Best of all, some robust country dancing and some pungent music (the last supplied by the Albion Band) are included in the production, making an entrancing undertaking of it. From the moment when the actors come bounding on to the stage, and line up for "Circassian Circle", an irresistible liveliness prevails.

The pre-industrial past is adumbrated by means of characters like Old Queenie, a beekeeper, and Old Sally, who once, as a child, drove her flock of geese to feed on common land; and there's a flash forward to the First World War, which brought about a fairer wage for agricultural workers, but left hardly a family in Lark Rise unscathed. Scenes from the 1880s include the removal to the workhouse of an old soldier, gatherings of village gossips (women) and farm labourers (men), the last letting rip with bawdy talk, or recalling getting in a field of oats in record time. We see the "king of the Mowers" crowned with a straw hat, and watch the arrival of a cheapjack salesman whose wares are vastly preferred to the old cottage furniture of earlier generations.

All this takes place against an enormous backdrop of earth and sky and distant trees, with fences on the stage which convert into a pen for a pig-sticking, and even do duty as a country pub when the need arises. The allocation of parts is equally economical, with more than one role for nearly every actor. The cast is splendid, the direction is assured, and the general effect picturesque without being in the

For the common good

T. O. Treadwell

CHARLES DICKENS
Hard Times
Adapted by Stephen Jeffreys.
The Orange Tree, Richmond.

Dramatizations of Charles Dickens's works began with the hugely successful public readings by the author himself and have proliferated ever since. It is not difficult to see why this should be the case; perhaps no other novelist translates more naturally to the stage than Dickens, with his genius for characterization and dialogue and his strong sense of plot. As the Royal Shakespeare Company's recent production of *Nicholas Nickleby* has shown, Dickens on stage can still pull in the crowds.

Nicholas Nickleby was performed in two parts by a large company in a spacious theatre; the revival of Stephen Jeffreys's adaptation of *Hard Times* with a cast of four playing in the small empty space of The Orange Tree is as remote from this as possible in terms of scale, but dramatically it is at least as successful. *Hard Times* is compact by Dickensian standards, with a relatively simple plot and few major characters, but to dramatize the whole novel in two-and-three-quarter hours without over-simplification or loss of clarity, as Sam Walters's production does, is a remarkable achievement.

That this adaptation works so well is chiefly due to the excellence of the cast, whose four virtuoso members divide between them some *Times* is the embarrassing Stephen Blackpool subplot, and though the adaptation takes further liberties with this than it does with the other elements in the novel, it remains (to use Stephen's favourite word) a muddle. The ranting demagoguery of the union organizer Slackbridge, which blurs the political focus of Dickens's book, is suppressed in Jeffreys's version, and he allows Stephen to express a set of beliefs in the virtues of compromise and the need for workers and managers to labour together for the common good which is only hinted at in Dickens's text. This does explain more clearly why Stephen refuses to join his comrades in their strike, but it is ludicrously inadequate as a response to the callous ruthlessness of Bounderby and his fellows and its effect is to make the saintly mill-hand even less human.

There are a few other causes for regret. The role of the bloodlessly calculating Bitzer, one of the most effective characters in the novel, is underdeveloped in the play, and this blunts the irony of the conclusion in which Gradgrind must acknowledge that Blitzer's heartlessness, like Tom's selfishness, is a product of his own narrow system, and that both young men are, in a sense, his sons. It seems a pity that more isn't made of Dickens's powerful use of Sleary's circus, seedy as it is, to represent the worlds of pleasure and imagination, though admittedly it isn't easy to see how this could have been conveyed very clearly on the stage.

But the pleasures offered by this production far outweigh these few complaints. The Orange Tree's *Hard Times* is well constructed, intelligently directed, and, above all, superbly acted; it is well up to the high standards of this

Uncertain continuities

Mary McAuley

ROBERT V. DANIELS
Russia: The roots of confrontation
411pp. Harvard University Press. £22.75.
0 674 77965 7
RONALD TIERSKY
Ordinary Stalinism: Democratic centralism and the question of communist political development
209pp. Allen and Unwin. £15.
0 04 320168 7

During recent years scholars working on the Soviet Union have been reconsidering their assessments of the nature and origins of the post-Stalin system. Whereas in the 1960s changes of approach within Western social science, including new comparative methods, had an important influence on the study of the communist world, today's Sovietologists are less sure the answer lies there. Developments, often unexpected (the Brezhnev stagnation, the Polish August and its aftermath, Eurocommunism's rise and decline), in the context of increasing superpower tension, as well as a burst of critical writings from recent émigrés, have had an unsettling effect. Digestion and reflection are the order of the day.

The results are now appearing in a wave of books on the Soviet system and in the occasional volume on the communist world, still a very difficult topic. The variety of the approaches is greatly to be welcomed: there is no orthodoxy at present. However there are tendencies (to borrow a useful word from communist party vocabulary), and the bringing back of history, Russian history, to explain the Soviet system is just such a one. Although the historical contribution was never as absent from analysis as is often claimed, it is true that the 1970s were marked both by exciting new historical research and a more historical approach from the political scientists. It is interesting, though, that while the latter have tended to concentrate on tracing the continuities of autocratic phenomena from prerevolutionary Russia through to the present, historians are reviving the idea of a progressive and liberal Tsarist order which the Revolution destroyed.

Robert V. Daniels's *Russia*, a wide-ranging historical account of today's Soviet system, is a good representative of this tendency. Unfortunately presented in one of Harvard's irritating rather than eye-catching designs, the book's aim is to explain to the American reader how a complex Russian past is responsible for the Soviet present, since only on the basis of such an understanding can United States–Soviet dialogue take place. Instead of an analysis which sees Marxism and Lenin's views on party organization leading inexorably to a government bent on world domination (a commonly held American view), Professor Daniels suggests that historical traditions, revolutionary experience, problems of modernization and Stalin's personality have fused to produce a conservative order whose overriding concern is national security. Although antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union is inevitable, confrontation, let alone war, is not. The aim is laudable and any naive American reader will quickly learn that something called a communist revolution of 1917 cannot explain why Soviet leaders act as they do. The strength of the book lies in its emphasis on the complexity of Soviet developments. But this is also its weakness. There is no real coherence to the analysis. After more than a hundred pages of historical background, the reader is told that it was the two decades which followed the Revolution that were responsible for today's stable Soviet system. The contributory factors crowd in – the inevitability of a counter-revolutionary dictator, modernization, political decisions, the ideology of the upwardly mobile – sometimes contradicting each other. We still need to be told which elements in the historical past are the important ones, and Daniels offers us too many.

At first sight, Ronald Tiersky's *Ordinary Stalinism* – a brief analysis of the development of "democratic centralism" within the Soviet party after the Revolution, of its adoption, dictated from Moscow, by the wider communist movement, and of attempts at reform by today's communist parties – would seem to be a throw-back to the old Sovietological obsession with Lenin's views on party organization. But the difference lies in Tiersky's concern to identify "democratic centralism" in terms of the particular political practices – constituting a political culture and including a very definite set of ideological components – which characterized the communist movement once factions had been banned. This does not have much to do with Lenin or ambiguous notions of "democratic centralism" floating about in the pre-First World War socialist parties. Tiersky is interested in whether these remarkably resilient political practices can change without disintegrating entirely.

His conclusion (based on case studies of the Italian and French communist parties and with passing reference to Yugoslavia and China) seems to be that change is possible but unlikely. Only extremely propitious circumstances will allow it. But we need Ronald Tiersky to work out his very stimulating ideas more fully, to block in what is really an introductory sketch. His conclusions are disappointingly weak. Still, this is an interesting book, and rightly suggests that the way forward is to recognize that there are both "Soviet-type" practices (as there are "liberal-democratic" practices) and countries, each with its own history.

Knights at the circus

Kyril FitzLyon

ALBERT SEATON
The Horsemen of the Steppes: The story of the Cossacks
268pp. Bodley Head. £15.
0 370 30534 5

Who are the Cossacks? Or, rather, who were they? For, as Albert Seaton points out in *The Horsemen of the Steppes*, "true Cossackdom" died in 1920. Were they a nationality? A fighting force? Russia's Foreign Legion? Mounted Police? Ceremonial escort troops? Circus riders? The answer is – all these things at different times, and roughly in that order.

Since its earliest days as a group of principalities, Russia was surrounded by enemies, of which the Mongols (Tartars) proved the most powerful. Not only did they succeed in the thirteenth century in establishing their overlordship which Muscovy was unable to shake off till the fifteenth, but Tartar border raids and more serious incursions continued for several centuries.

Tartar warfare, so successful in Russia and beyond, was carried on by nomadic horsemen known as "cossacks", a Turkic term originally meaning "free men", men not bound by law, then "bandits" or "marauders", later still "troopers" in the Tartar "hordes" (armies), and applied by Russians and Poles to all "horsemen of the steppes", in Seaton's apt phrase. The success of the tactics employed by these horsemen at last suggested to their victims that no resistance was possible except by the creation of a similar body of "mounted men living in the pattern of hordes, always under arms and military discipline", foraging for food, women and loot at the enemy's expense.

At first these mounted men or "cossacks" were Tartars who had defected to the Russian side in exchange for pay and other benefits, but gradually Russians took over, and by the sixteenth century Russian cossacks came into existence, retaining many of their Mongol predecessors' customs and also words, including *tovarishch*, comrade. In the course of time these Russian cossacks were joined by disaffected elements of races and ethnic groups from all over Russia – fugitives from justice, government oppression, serfdom, debt, religious persecution – who established themselves in settlements along the rivers Don, Dniepr, Terek and later in Siberia and elsewhere. The authority of the *ataman* (another Tartar word) or military head of the "host" (army) in time of a campaign was absolute. In peacetime, democracy ruled, with all decisions adopted in assemblies where every male took part, and with free elections – by universal male suffrage – of all administrative and military offices, including that of *ataman*. Each "host" had its own customs and traditions, laws and styles of dress (for men and women), and followed its own distinctive occupation when not engaged in fighting. Thus, the Dniepr cossacks specialized in fishing and boat building, while the Don cossacks turned to cattle breeding and eventually to arable farming (earlier so despised that it was forbidden on pain of death).

Clearly, no government could tolerate for ever the semi-autonomous status of armed men, who, though useful to the central authorities when their purposes coincided, waged war on their own account against the country's neighbours (mostly Poland and Turkey) and sometimes against the central government itself. Gradually the cossacks' independence was whittled down. Their territorial administration, with its division into "hosts" living in *stanitsas* (settlements), continued in a modified form till the Revolution, but their military organization was dovetailed into, though not merged with, the regular army. They provided escort troops on ceremonial occasions and frequently performed the functions of mounted police.

None of this survived the Revolution and the mass deportations that followed. A dozen years later, agricultural collectivization ensured the cossacks' final disappearance in all but name. Those able to escape to the West earned a reputation as circus riders.

Colonel Seaton supplies much fascinating information, but presents it in a style reminiscent of a military report, with details regarding uniforms, snaffles, recruitment centres etc, which the general reader will find difficult not to skip. Historians will question some of his facts – Ivan III's flight from the Tartars, the feeble-minded tsar Theodore conducting a policy different from that of the Regent Boris Godunov, 1703 as the date of the capital's transfer from Moscow to St Petersburg. The index is excellent, but should not refer to Peter I (the Great) as Peter II.

Coercion in Comecon

Archie Brown

MICHAEL CHARLTON
The Eagle and the Small Birds: Crisis in the Soviet Empire – from Yalta to Solidarity
192pp. BBC. £8.75.
0 563 20272 6
KAREN DAWISHA
The Kremlin and the Prague Spring
426pp. University of California Press. £22.50.
0 520 04971 3
ADAM B. ULAM
Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in world politics, 1970–1982
325pp. Oxford University Press. £5.95.
0 19 503424 4

These three books are all concerned, in their different ways, with Soviet foreign policy in the post-war era. Two of them, those by Michael Charlton and Karen Dawisha, deal with the Soviet–East European relationship, whereas Adam B. Ulam's is about the Soviet Union's role in the world as a whole, but with particular emphasis on relations with the other superpower.

The Eagle and the Small Birds is a fascinating distillation of oral history, based on interviews with many important participants in the events described, as well as with a number of leading academic observers. It is an outgrowth of a series of documentary programmes broadcast on the BBC's Radio 4, though it contains much more of the interview material than could be incorporated in the broadcasts. Michael Charlton's well-informed probing elicits many interesting reflections, some new information and a variety of views on the way relations between the Soviet Union (the "Eagle") and the East European states (the "Small Birds") are likely to evolve.

Some of the most interesting material concerns the establishment of communist power in Eastern Europe in the early post-war years. Thus, Zoltan Vas, formerly a prominent member of the Hungarian communist hierarchy, describes in some detail the "salami tactics" applied to the elimination of rival political forces in Hungary, and Eugen Loebl and Bela Szasz – themselves victims of show trials in Czechoslovakia and Hungary respectively – describe why, in their view, Rudolf Slansky in the one case and Laszlo Rajk in the other were chosen to be the principal communist victims in these macabre rites.

If the book has a weakness, it is that it concentrates almost exclusively on the mechanics of coercion and conflict and pays little attention to the evolution of a more complex relationship between some East European countries and the Soviet Union in recent years, in which influence does not flow entirely in one direction. The Hungarians, Bulgarians and East Germans have instituted economic reforms of different types and degrees of radicalism which have their supporters in Moscow (not to mention Novosibirsk), and each of which is cited frequently in the debates on economic reform now going on within the Soviet Union itself.

A timely reminder that there are, however, limits to Soviet tolerance of independent models of socialism within Comecon, and that there is likely to be argument inside the Soviet establishment concerning the most appropriate response to an East European communist régime which goes so far as to attempt to institutionalize political pluralism, is provided by Karen Dawisha's *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*. To study Soviet reactions to events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 means, by this time, going over some well-trodden ground, but the primary sources which can be drawn upon have continued to grow in recent years, and Professor Dawisha uses them to good effect.

In a careful analysis, she shows that while the possibility of military intervention was raised as early as April 1968 and became a more concrete option by May, right up until August there were Soviet leaders who were striving to avoid it. The political change in Czechoslovakia was pretty well anathema to the entire Soviet leadership (though congenial to a significant section of the Soviet intelligentsia – and that, from their leaders' point of view, was part of the problem), but those with institutional responsibilities for uniting as much of the international communist movement as possible against China (notably Suslov and Ponomarev) were reluctant invaders, as was Kosygin, who was not unsympathetic to the Czech economic, as distinct from political, reform. Brezhnev, as usual, sat on the fence for as long as he could before coming down energetically on the winning side.

There are a couple of diverting slips in the book. When at one point during the talks at the beginning of August 1968 between the Soviet and Czech leaders at Cierna nad Tisou, Brezhnev was feigning illness, Professor Dawisha says he complained of being "too ill-disposed to hold full-scale negotiations". Later, the Soviet doctrine concerning what was happening in Czechoslovakia in 1968 is described as that of "quiet revolution". A quiet revolution it was, in many ways, but the phrase actually used in Moscow was "quiet counter-revolution". But these are trivial errors. Much more important is the fact that this is the fullest and most thoroughly researched analysis available of Soviet decision-making during what was for the Politburo the prolonged crisis of 1968.

Adam B. Ulam takes up almost at the point where Karen Dawisha leaves off in his account of the Soviet Union in world politics from 1970 until 1982. In *Dangerous Relations* he covers a great deal of ground in lively fashion. The book, indeed, is well enough written to appeal to a substantially broader readership than that of academic students of politics and international relations, though, as an overview, it will be useful to them too. One of its strengths is that it pays attention to the links between domestic politics and foreign policy, giving due emphasis, for instance, to the constraints imposed upon the executive arm of government in the United States by the legislature and a suspicious press in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate.

Self-defeating triumphs

Raymond Carr

J.L. GARCÍA DELGADO (Editor)
La España de la Restauración: Política, economía, legislación y cultura
545pp. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
PABLO MARTÍN ACEÑA and LEANDRO PRADOS DE LA ESCOSURA (Editors)
La nueva historia económica en España
341pp. Madrid: Tecnos.
NICOLAS SANCHEZ-ALBORNOZ (Editor)
La modernización económica de España 1830–1930
343pp. Madrid: Alianza.
JAVIER TUSELL
Oligarquía y caciquismo en Andalucía (1890–1923)
589pp. Barcelona: Planeta.
SANTOS JULÍA DÍAZ
Madrid 1931–1934: De la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases
509pp. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
JUAN AVILÉS FARRÉ
La Izquierda burguesa en la II República
397pp. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe.
JULIO ARÓSTEGUI and JESÚS A. MARTINEZ
La Junta de Defensa de Madrid
469pp. Communidad de Madrid.
JULIÁN CASANOVA
Anarquismo y revolución en la sociedad rural aragonesa
368pp. Madrid: Siglo XXI.

As Francoism disintegrated in the late 1960s and a more liberal system appeared as a distant prospect, so Spanish historians became concerned with the past of liberalism in their country. Apart from the work of a distinguished handful the study of contemporary history had been at a discount. Within a few years it became a national industry and a publishers' bonanza. Its obsession was failure. Why did liberal democracy fail to take root in Spain, to be swept aside *manu militari* in 1923 and 1936? Why did the Second Republic of 1931–6 end in a Civil War in which the forces of democracy were defeated? Why did Spain fail to follow the path of other Western nations and become a modernized industrial society?

Historians tackled these problems with a new kit of tools. Some were loaned from the *Annales* school; *marxisant* analysis abounded, given the salience of the Communist party in the anti-Francoist opposition. Later came the influence of Anglo-Saxon models. American and British political science dominated the study of elections and party structures (one of its most sophisticated exponents is the present Socialist Minister of Education, José María Maravall). Marxist analyses were overhauled by a growing band of enthusiasts for quantitative methods, whose mathematical techniques are fully displayed in the volume edited by Martín Aceña and Leandro Prados. Economic history is the current fashion; its exponents have the financial support of the great banks and their own organ, the *Revista de Historia Económica*. Seminars and colloquia have experienced a mushroom growth and it is in seminars that all the contributions to the collective volumes reviewed here originated. They provide an indispensable guide to the Spanish historiographical Renaissance.

As far as the political history of pre-Civil War Spain is concerned, the new history is revolutionary in its methods and scholarship rather than in its conclusions. Contemporary critics would have agreed with the contributors to *La España de la Restauración* that the formally liberal monarchy collapsed in 1931 because it failed to become, in practice, a democratic monarchy. A professional élite used *caciques* (local bosses) in order to manipulate the electoral system, thus making impossible any connection between the "real" Spain of the people and the "official" Spain of the politicians. Mercedes Cabrera analyses the abortive efforts of the conservative Antonio Maura to achieve that connection by a revolution from above that would destroy *caciquismo*. What historians like Javier Tusell, in his classic study of Andalusian *caciquismo*, have achieved is to expose the workings of the system at the local level. This strengthens the "realist" element in Spanish historiography: like history, where French and Anglo-Saxon models have had little influence. Often it is the focus the lineaments of the larger community: hence the signal contribution to historical understanding made by ethnologists and social anthropologists such as Julio Caro Baroja and Carmelo Lisón Toledano.

Social history is less fashionable than economic history. The texture of everyday life escapes us. Macroeconomic analysis abounds. Business history is almost non-existent. Encouraged by the resurgence of peripheral nationalisms in quest of "integrated" regional economies, regional history, well represented in *La modernización económica de España 1830–1930*, has taken off, perhaps to the disadvantage of more detailed local studies. The history of constitutions is more developed than the history of the legal system. Yet as José María Jover wrote, the legal system has "a social authenticity superior to that of constitutional texts". The essays on the Restoration codes in the volume edited by García Delgado go some way towards soldering a connection between laws and life. But much remains to be explored. Experts in political science have refined political history; no great political biography has emerged. The new history sometimes wears an inhuman face, with methodological austerity verging on narrative aridity. An exception is Santos Julía's remarkable study of the union conflicts during the Second Republic: it gives a wonderfully vivid vision of the labour world of Madrid in the early 1930s.

Whereas the reason for the political failure of nineteenth-century bourgeois liberalism is undisputed, the causes of economic failure remain a subject of controversy. It is presented as a series of missed opportunities: Gabriel Tortella's "crowding out" of productive investment by the demands of the Treasury; Nadal's influential thesis that the "colonial" exploitation of non-renewable resources relegated Spain to a Third World rank, its factors of production tied to an export trade in primary products whose profits leaked abroad. Railways, according to Nadal, were an "instrument of colonization" by foreign companies, with the native metallurgical industry denied the feedback effects of railway construction. Antonio Gómez rescues railways from these attacks: Spanish industry could not supply the needs of the railway network and to have delayed construction until it could would have delayed also the social savings yielded by a modern transport system. Leandro Prados makes the case for a modest contribution to growth by the export trade. Jordi Palafox, in an interesting essay, shows how Valencian farmers successfully and profitably adapted to changing international demand and does something to dispel the notion that failure to invest profits in a local shipping line or to finance the marketing of citrus fruits represented a missed opportunity. Both marketing and transport were handled more cheaply and efficiently by outside concerns. An "integrated" Valencian economy is the mirage of Valencian nationalists.

The consensus that emerges from the essays here on economic history is that much of the blame for frustrated development lies with an economic nationalism and a protectionist zeal that was to endow Spain with the highest tariff barriers in the world. These not only insulated her from the international economy and shielded established interests – the Basque metallurgical and shipping magnates, the Catalan textile manufacturers and Asturian coal-mining companies – from the challenge of competition. Above all, protectionism kept in being an archaic cereal economy which, given low wages, could generate only a feeble domestic demand; protection raised food prices in the "modern" periphery in order to salvage the Castilian heartland, with its abysmally low productivity. To Tortella the ravages of exaggerated protectionism are "self-evident"; but he does admit to a "mild geographical determinism". Mountains – all economic historians should travel by rail from Madrid to Asturias – aridity, poor soil, lack of navigable rivers, bear some of the responsibility for the difficulties of development, as do archaic tenurial systems (well analysed by Antonio Bernal), *latifundia*, lack of native entrepreneurial spirit and foreign "devils".

Economic historians have concentrated their attention on the consolidation of capitalism, which led, as Nadal argues, to the replace-

the early nineteenth century by a conservative reaction – economic, social and political. The collapse of the Second Republic and the defeat of the Civil War are seen, in a large measure, in more narrowly political terms. Juan Avilés Farré studies in detail the political fortunes of the Left Republicans. With differing degrees of conviction they saw as their historic task the short-circuiting of social revolution by incorporating the demands of Marxist Socialism into the Republican programme. This was no easy task given the uncompromising hostility of an intransigent right to modest social reform and a Socialist party that drifted towards "bolshevization", with its leader, Largo Caballero, posing as a half-hearted Spanish Lenin. The Socialist–Left Republican coalition governments of Azaña did attempt to carry out a moderate programme of social reform. Yet a Gladstonian zeal for balanced budgets left agrarian reform a paper promise, embodied in advanced legislation but crippled in application by lack of money.

Given an electoral law that favoured broad coalitions, the decision of the Left Republicans, fearful of losing their bourgeois base, and the Socialists, disillusioned with the fruits of bourgeois reformism, to fight the election of 1933 as separate parties was an act of political suicide. The Republican Left itself, although socially homogeneous, since it was almost exclusively composed of professionals – many of them Freemasons – united politically only with difficulty. The ravages of factionalism – Gordón Ordax, a leader of the Radical Socialists, was a bitter and determined enemy of Azaña as the only statesman who could unite the left – are set out in depressing detail by Avilés Farré; his treatment of the controversial issue of the influence of Masonry, is balanced and convincing. His book concludes with a gloomy survey of the months immediately prior to the Civil War. Elections and party structures are analysed with the latest mathematical techniques. A useful bibliography of contributions to this growth industry is contained in Javier Tusell's introduction.

Both the works on the *Junta de Defensa de Madrid* and on *Anarquismo y revolución en la sociedad rural aragonesa* cast a painful light on the internecine struggles that weakened the Republic at war. Popular resistance to the Nationalist military rising of July 18 unleashed what has been called the "spontaneous revolution": the take-over of governmental functions at the local level by the committee rule of the proletarian parties and unions; the collectivization (ie, the establishment of some form of workers' control) of industry and agriculture; and the waging of the war by militia columns. As Franco's army advanced relentlessly on Madrid the limitations of revolutionary voluntarism, appealing as it was to Auden and Orwell, became evident. The dismantling of the spontaneous revolution, the re-establishment of the authority of the central government and the creation of a regular army became "the supreme task" of the old revolutionary, Largo Caballero, as Prime Minister in September 1937. In this he was supported by the Communists as enthusiastic proponents, for their own purposes, of centralization and a return to orthodox government.

Though the main beneficiaries of the spontaneous revolution were the anarcho-syndicalists, the leaders of the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), not without qualms of conscience, supported Largo's policies and joined his government in November. For the militants of the CNT who had tasted power in the streets of Barcelona to replace committees and dissolve militias was to betray their movement's ideological heritage and to fling away the fruits of a revolution unexpectedly handed to them on a plate by the popular risings of July 18 and 19.

The minutes of the Madrid Junta, set up to organize the defence of the capital after the government had fled to Valencia, are reprinted with an introduction by Julio Aróstegui and Jesús A. Martinez. They make absorbing reading. You hear the protagonists of centraliza-

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Marginal subsistence

Virgil Nemoianu

VLAD GEORGESCU
Istoria românilor de la origini pînă în zilele noastre
394pp. Oakland, CA/Munich: Dumitru.

In 1964, immediately upon the death of Romania's first post-war dictator, his successors decided that within one year the first history of the Romanian Communist Party must be ready for publication. Over twenty years later it is still not available. Similarly, the multi-volume history of the Romanian people initiated by the national Academy in 1960, and intended to be both official and definitive, also ran into trouble and remains unfinished to this day. These examples indicate how precarious the status of historical memory is in a dictatorial society (where history is the *ancilla* of politics).

But in fairness to the historiographers of Romania we have to add that their topic also is often elusive and unattractive. Arnold Toynbee justified his sweeping and philosophical mode of writing history by pointing out that many local and national histories could never constitute intelligible objects of historical study because they needed a broader context if they were to have narrative coherence. This certainly holds good for the history of Romania, which was always a function of Austrians and Turks, Russians and Romans, Westerners and Byzantines. It was a history of dependency and, usually, of ugly, monotonous oppression. Some writers, indeed, such as Mircea Eliade and E. M. Cioran, have tried to explain this dismal record by the concept of a "boycott of history" – an instinctive withdrawal from and rejection of history by a stubbornly pastoral population which is contemptuous of the futilities of human striving, resentful of being caught up in them and nostalgic for some mysteriously lost paradise.

There are few periods of Romanian history when some coherence can be detected. The fifteenth century in Moldavia allowed for a measure of organic continuity under long-reigning and responsible feudal princes. In the century between the revolts of 1848 and the Communist take-over of 1947 the country was a legitimate though marginal and probational member of the European community; this was, for all its faults, an age of liberty and order, in which Romania took purposeful strides towards worthy cultural and economic goals, both in the independent Danubian half of the country and in its Transylvanian half, which was, until 1918, under Habsburg rule. I would add to these periods the seventeenth century, when the Danubian principalities were a haven for skilled artisans and intellectuals coming from south of the Danube and elsewhere (even from as far away as the Caucasus). A cosmopolitan atmosphere, relatively peaceful times and a fair amount of tolerance allowed the arts and culture to blossom and sent beneficial impulses travelling east and south.

A surprising amount of worthwhile research on the Romanian past (much of it published in the past forty years) is now available, but existing surveys are either too dependent on the details or fret too much over the disputed and blank areas (the "historical enigmas"). Thus the language clearly descends from the eastern branch of Low Vulgar Latin but does this prove anything about the ethnic make-up of the inhabitants? Probably not, but where else can these be placed in any typology of European nationalities? Was there a continuity of population in the Dacian province between the withdrawal of the Roman legions and garrisons under the Emperor Aurelian (AD 275) and 1000–1200 when reliable historical information is once again available? Common sense would say yes, but the data are too spotty and contradictory to allow for certainty.

More important, what narrative pattern, if any, can we impose on the successive events that occurred over the centuries in this Carpathian and Danubian region? Vlad Georgescu seems to think that the most reasonable explanatory framework is to read Romanian history in terms of *marginality*. The main socio-historical structures of Western Europe (feudalism, capitalism, Romanticism and the like) can be recognized in Romanian history, albeit in a distorted and untypical shape. Georgescu's narrative suggests an ebb and flow of proximity to Western European developments: thus from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries there are many analogies with the West, while the gap widens again in the next two centuries; it is gradually closed between 1800 and 1950, but deepens and widens yet again after the Second World War.

Georgescu is basically a classical liberal with Weberian overtones, who barely hides his preference for a rational, urban and Western-oriented Romania. (He is relatively young; he grew up after the last war, became a dissident, spent time in prison and now lives in the West.) His approach is, for Romanian historiography, bold and innovative: over large stretches, particularly of the earlier periods, he dispenses altogether with political and chronological history and simply gives us a synthetic picture of the main features. This technique works particularly well for the eighteenth century (the field in which Georgescu specializes) in the Danubian principalities. This is generally, and rightly, considered an age of abject national decline into colonial rule by Istanbul-appointed Greek ("Phanariot") entrepreneurs, in which moral corruption and social oppression went hand in hand. Yet it was also an age of avid reading, enthusiasm for Enlightened ideas and legislation, and polished extravangance. It is a great merit of Georgescu's account that he does justice to the contradictions of the age in a subtle and fair presentation. This method works well also for his account of the forty years of Communist rule, of which his is perhaps the most articulate brief description now in print. It allows the conclusion that the first half of this period, although filled with violence and a waste of human resources, also witnessed some broadly defensible economic initiatives and offered vague glimpses of a socialist vision of justice. By contrast, the two later decades under Ceausescu were founded on oppressive incompetence and savage buffoonery, somehow reviving and enhancing all the most repugnant features of Romania's historical tradition.

The defects of the book are often the reverse side of its merits. Its structure is unbalanced – for instance, the whole early history up to 1731 is covered in fewer pages than the period 1938–83, which occupies almost one-third of the book. By contrast, one misses many interesting details of the medieval period; we could have done with portraits of some of the colourful gallery of voivodes and boyars. Culture and religion are treated superficially and with a sort of odd distaste, to the book's disadvantage.

Intellectual life and the self-consciousness of local élites have played a large part in Romanian history and to ignore them is seriously to impoverish its texture. It should also be added that neither the Romanian-American Academy, which sponsored the book, nor Dumitru Verlag, its valiant émigré publisher, seems to have provided the kind of editorial support needed by this enterprise: there are many small errors of all kinds.

But despite its imbalances and gaps Vlad Georgescu's book is erudite and written in a clear and lapidary style and maintains a fair and dispassionate stance in its account of events. This is the best available introduction to the puzzles of Romanian history; it deserves to be translated into English.

Forgotten fascination

Steven Runciman

HANNAH PAKULA
The Last Romantic: A biography of Queen Marie of Romania
510pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.
0 297 785982

Instead of its present meaningless title Hannah Pakula's book might well have been called "The Last Ruritanian", or even "The Last Byzantine"; for Marie of Romania saw herself as a Byzantine empress, and the poster of her in her coronation robes, reproduced in *The Last Romantic*, shows how splendidly fitted she was for the role.

Marie of Edinburgh was the daughter of Queen Victoria's second son and of the daughter of Tsar Alexander II. Her cousin, the future George V, was eager to marry her; but the marriage was prevented by her mother, who disliked her British in-laws. She would have made a more colourful queen of Britain than good Queen Mary, but she was perhaps better suited to a Balkan throne. Before she was eighteen she was married off to Ferdinand of Romania, a gormless youth who was nephew and heir to King Carol, the grim joyless German to whom the Powers had assigned the Romanian throne. Her life as Crown Princess was restricted and not made easier by Carol's Queen, the poetess Carmen Sylva, one of the great tragicomic characters in royal history. But Marie's beauty and charm won her great popularity among the people. When war broke out in 1914 and King Carol wished to join the Central Powers, she was considered to be the leader of the popular pro-Anglo-French party. The old King died in October that year, and after twenty-one years of waiting Marie at last was Queen and, as she ruled her weak husband, chief power in the state. Under her influence Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente in 1916. But the collapse of Russia next year led to the country being overrun and devastated by the Germans. The sacrifices were worth while. Owing mainly to the Queen's presence at Versailles, Romania emerged from the peace treaties with her territory more than doubled, to make her one of the largest countries in Europe.

Marie only enjoyed twelve years as Queen. They were happy years at first. She married her two elder daughters to the Crown Princes of Greece and Yugoslavia and her son the Crown Prince Carol to a Greek princess. But Carol was an unsatisfactory son. By 1926 he had deserted his wife and son and gone into exile with the voluptuous Mme Lupescu, giving up his rights to the throne. In 1926 Marie went on an ill-advised visit to the United States, which began glamorously but ended as a fiasco; and she returned to find her husband dying. Her life as a dowager was less interesting. She was allowed no part in the running of the country either by the regents for her grandson, King Michael, or by her son Carol when he returned to claim the throne. He treated her cruelly with odd flashes of kindness. With the exception of her youngest daughter, Ileana, her other children were of no help to her. She took refuge in writing; and, indeed, *The Story of My Life* is perhaps the most entertaining of all royal memoirs, containing a number of brilliant vignettes of her relatives and friends. In March, 1937, she fell mysteriously ill with internal haemorrhages and never fully recovered. She died in July, 1938.

Besides her published writings she left behind her very full diaries and countless letters. Mrs Pakula has been through them all thoroughly, and through numberless relevant documents of all sorts. The result is a remarkably complete biography, written without great distinction but very readable. Mrs Pakula treats her heroine with sympathy and affection, though well aware of her intense narcissism and her occasional silliness. She is perhaps almost too conscientious in her rejection of gossip. While admitting the Queen's long love-affair with Prince Stirbey, she will not allow that Princess Ileana was the Prince's daughter, though everyone at the time noticed the girl's extraordinary resemblance to the Prince's own daughters. She denies firmly the rumour that the Queen's mysterious illness was due to her having been shot in a family brawl by her younger son, Prince Nicholas: though Crown Prince Umberto of Italy, when Nicholas was sent at once into exile there, told a friend that he really could not receive a man who had just shot his mother.

Perhaps the very fullness of the book prevents it from bringing out clearly enough the extraordinary fascination that the Queen was able quite naturally to command. There are few people in the West who remember her now. But she was a legend in her time; and even today in Communist Romania, if you mention that you knew Queen Marie, there is a quickening of interest and you sense a whiff of nostalgia for the days of the beautiful Queen who did so much for her adopted country.

The mainsprings of heroism

Andrew Mango

ERIK JAN ZÜRCHER
The Unionist Factor: The role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905–1926
202pp.
Leiden: E. J. Brill. Hfl66.

VAMIK D. VOLKAN and NORMAN ITZKOWITZ
The Immortal Atatürk: A psychobiography
374pp. University of Chicago Press. £34.50.
0 226 86388 3

What makes great men? Is it nature, nurture, circumstance, or all three? Consider the case of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Turkish Republic. As every (Turkish) schoolboy knows, he was born plain Mustafa in Ottoman Salonica in 1881. At the age of seven he lost his father, a retired customs officer, turned unsuccessful business man. At the age of twelve he enrolled in a military school, to emerge twelve years later from the Istanbul Staff College as a young captain in the infantry and a Young Turk in politics. In the course of his military education he acquired his second name, Kemal ("perfection"), and a philosophy, at once nationalist and positivist. His education also inspired him with ambition which is, as Sir Francis Bacon observed, "like choler . . . an humour that maketh men active, earnest, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it be not stopped".

Mustafa Kemal's ambition was not thwarted by the difficulty which he experienced in forcing his way through the ranks of the Young Turks, when the latter seized power in 1908. The Great War gave him his chance: in 1915 he stopped the British in two decisive engagements in the Dardanelles; in 1916 he recaptured two towns from the Russians in eastern Turkey; in 1918 he saved his army from rout on the Syrian front. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire removed his main Young Turk rivals from the scene. Mustafa Kemal assumed the leadership of the Turkish national resistance in Anatolia in 1919, and proved himself when he held the invading Greeks in 1921 and expelled them from Anatolia the following year. Given full powers by the nationalist Assembly in 1921, he never, in effect, relinquished them, but used them to make peace with the Allies and regain the rest of the national territory, and then to establish within it a secular republic, seeking to achieve by forced marches "the level of contemporary (Western) civilization". He assumed the surname Atatürk (Father Turk) in 1934, and died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1938, to be immediately proclaimed "eternal leader", a title which the latest Turkish Constitution (drafted in 1982) reiterates, adding for good measure "and unrivalled hero".

Was Mustafa Kemal "the only man" (as his Turkish biographer Şevket Süreyya Aydemir called him), the only begetter of modern Turkey? Atatürk himself attributed the achievement to the Turkish nation, a disclaimer which does not name any peers in glory or acknowledge any antecedents in ideas. Historians have been less discreet.

In his standard work, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1961), Bernard Lewis described the Kemalist Republic as "the culmination of a long process, whereby the Turkish governing élite transformed itself, the state, and finally the country". "In his political ideas Kemal Atatürk was an heir to the Young Turks – more especially of the nationalist, positivist, and Westernizing wing among them." It is, therefore, "not surprising that some observers . . . should have regarded the new nationalist movement in Anatolia as a disguised reappearance of the discredited Committee of Union and Progress [the Young Turk party]. In a sense they were not entirely wrong. It soon became apparent, however, that something new and different was afoot . . ."

This slight tarnishing of the image of Atatürk as "unrivalled hero" has now been continued by E. J. Zürcher of the University of Nijmegen who has examined orthodox Turkish history in the light of dissident sources – the memoirs of Mustafa Kemal's contemporaries. Dr Zürcher documents the progress of Mustafa Kemal as a Young Turk, a member of the Committee of Union and Progress (after his own conspiratorial group had failed to make an impression) important role in the revolution of 1908". Mustafa Kemal's antagonism towards Enver, the popular hero of 1908 (and leading Young Turk triumvir after the coup of 1913), dated back to their joint service against the Italians in Libya in 1911 and was reinforced as a result of a botched operation against the Bulgarians in 1913. However, Mustafa Kemal remained within the CUP, as a member of the faction of another triumvir, Cemal Pasha (military governor of Syria during the Great War), a faction which lost most of its influence after 1914. It was because the CUP "consisted of a conglomerate of factions in which no faction could afford to disturb the existing equilibrium" that Mustafa Kemal was able to lay down or refuse a command four times, openly to criticize the High Command, to survive rumours of having been involved in an attempted coup, and finish up as commander of an army group at the end of the First World War.

"Ball players" by Jean Lurçat, one of the paintings from the Alfred Caspari Collection which will be offered for sale by Karl and Faber in their Munich auction rooms (Amiraplatz 3/IV, Luitpoldblock, 8000 München 2) on October 29.

Zürcher's most interesting findings relate to events after the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire in November 1918. He argues that it was the CUP which laid plans for resistance in Anatolia, and that it contributed enormously to its success through the establishment of a secret organization called *Karakol* (The Guard), itself the successor of Enver's wartime Special Organization set up to subvert the Muslim subjects of Allied powers. That Mustafa Kemal favoured resistance to Allied plans to dismember Turkey is not in dispute. But he sought at first to stimulate political resistance through the Sultan's government. What then decided him to take his chance and go to Anatolia to lead armed resistance? Zürcher mentions four possibilities: "pressure from his fellow officers, his own judgment, the – very real – fear of being arrested, . . . [and] an agreement with *Karakol*". Or perhaps it was a combination of these factors. However, once Mustafa Kemal had made up his mind, he acted quickly and efficiently. He first gained the support of the two Turkish generals who still controlled central and eastern Anatolia with their troops (Ali Fuad Pasha in Ankara and Kazim Karabekir in Erzurum); he then superseded them. He eliminated his Unionist props – and rivals: *Karakol* in 1920, Enver Pasha's partisans in 1921 and the surviving Unionist leaders in 1923. Nevertheless, since Turkish nationalism and membership of the CUP were almost coterminous, Mustafa Kemal continued to work with and through Unionists – the ones who were loyal to him personally, only. Those who were not were finally purged in 1926 when some were hanged after the discovery of a plot against Mustafa Kemal's life, while many more were banished from public life. The purge went well beyond the small group of proven plotters; it was ruthless and it was calculated, for Mustafa Kemal went for real, not imagined rivals. The leading Young Turks had been adventurers; Mustafa Kemal was a realist, and once his ascendancy was established his régime became, in the words of Bernard Lewis, "a dictatorship without the uneasy over-the-shoulder glance, the terror of the door-bell, the dark menace of the concentration camp".

(Mustafa Kemal knew where to stop in death he had achieved the best possible terms). Even in his reforms, he discouraged, but did not ban, the veiling of women; and he halted the manufacture of a pure Turkish language, free of foreign loan words, when the new idiom threatened to become incomprehensible. This instinctive recognition of limits, Vamik Volkan and Normal Itzkowitz, authors of an interpretation of Atatürk's life according to the theories of Freud, attribute to the fact that Atatürk's father had been a customs officer at the Ottoman frontier. Written in a language which calls for interpretation (thus "narcissistic" stands for autocratic, "grandiosity" stands for ambition, but what does "orality" stand for?), this "psychobiography" will give much satisfaction to parodists of the Freudian style. Thus the authors find it significant that *Anadolu*, the Turkish word for Anatolia, where Mustafa Kemal organized his resistance movement, "may be translated literally as 'full of mother' " (one must be thankful that our hero never visited Motherwell); once in Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal "viewed himself as the newborn sun (son)" (did he think in English?); the pagan Turkish symbol of the grey wolf stands, of course, for a phallus, while the Bosporus "suggests the female genitalia in shape". Nor is one's understanding advanced by such gnomic statements as "He [Mustafa Kemal] had not yet satisfied his unconscious need to save the grieving mother, of whom in one sense he wanted to wipe out any lingering trace", or that during his drinking sessions, Mustafa Kemal "reviewed issues from different psychosexual levels, moving toward the oral and then back to the phallic, attempting to create a new Turkey . . . "

The historical background is (just about) adequate, but tends to the simplistic, as does the discussion of the central theme of Atatürk's "immortality". It is, of course, true that "more than forty years after his death his image is still used to foster a sense of national unity in Turkey"; it is also true that Atatürk claimed immortality for his Republic (although emphatically not for himself). There is no gainsaying either Atatürk's firmness of purpose or the magnitude of his impact on his country. But when one speaks "of the great 'fit' between him [Atatürk] and his people", one enters the controversial field of politics. The cult of Atatürk in Turkey today serves a political purpose, as did the cult of Caesars in antiquity, or the legend of Peter the Great in modern Russia. The cult and its purposes deserve study, but to this end Dr Volkan and Professor Itzkowitz have contributed little of value – little but not nothing, however. Muslim tradition has it that we should be grateful to anyone who teaches us – even as little as a new word or a new letter.

Volkan and Itzkowitz have not added appreciably to the sum of knowledge available to any reader of Lord Kinross's still unsurpassed biography (*Atatürk: The rebirth of a nation*, 1964). But in concentrating on the harshness of Atatürk's family background and on the difficulties which he experienced in forming personal relationships, they will encourage those readers who are not put off by the extravagance of their theories to reflect philosophically

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A lasting newness

Brian Stock

GERHART B. LADNER
Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages: Selected studies in history and art
Two volumes, 1,114pp. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.

Gerhart Ladner is one of the most versatile and distinguished medievalists of our time. He belongs to a small circle of scholars – one thinks of Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Kantorowicz, or perhaps E. R. Curtius – whose achievement reaches beyond specific disciplines and raises larger questions about the assumptions and values we associate with cultural history itself.

These two elegantly printed volumes cover some fifty years of productive research. They begin with the earliest in a series of studies in the political background of the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy; and, among recent publications, they include Ladner's magisterial address to the Haskins memorial conference, the title of whose published transactions, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, bears witness to a change in cultural outlook for which he is in part responsible. Early and late reflections on his favourite topics, such as symbolism and reform, are offered in sequence, and one can only marvel respectfully at the patience with which he has pursued his basic interests over the years, despite the collapse of political institutions in his native Vienna and the vicissitudes of a very different intellectual setting, first in Toronto, later in New York, and finally in Los Angeles. To make these volumes more useful for the scholar and the general reader, he has added some thirty-seven pages of notes and corrections. These answer criticisms, occasionally revise dating, and generally bring up to date the bibliography of the many subjects he touches upon.

Ladner's early training in art history and in Byzantine studies provided him with an outstanding vantage-point for understanding the evolution of such complex Christian symbols as the cross, the square nimbus, and the biblical corner-stone. Comparison between East and West (which, as Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable have recently reminded us, is still all too rare among Western medievalists) also opened the door to many refreshing insights in his studies of the portraits of the early Christian and medieval popes, some eight of which are reproduced here in conjunction with his three-volume *Papstbildnisse*, published between 1941 and 1982. The ease with which he moves from Greek to Latin traditions of thought is remarkable. One sees it, for instance, in his appreciation of the ideas behind the notion of an image in John Damascene and Theodore of Studion, as opposed to the less sophisticated conception popular in the Latin West, in which, as Rabanus Maurus summed it up, pictures were inevitably subordinate to holy texts. The Greek contributions are also rich in implications for Latin. An example is the essay on the philosophical anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa. Ladner sets him apart from earlier speculation on the book of Genesis, and helps to explain why his thinking on the creation of man provided such a powerful stimulus to questioning inherited Latin theology in Johannes Scottus Eriugena, in whom Western speculation on the subject begins anew.

One of Ladner's lifelong interests has been ideas of renewal and reform in later antiquity and the Middle Ages. His monumental book *The Idea of Réform* (1959) is anticipated by a number of early essays in this collection, while his paper "Renewal in the Twelfth Century" tells us something of a second, promised volume dealing with the high Middle Ages. In the book as well as the essays it is clear that reform is more than a topos of intellectual history. It is a seminal idea, distinguishable from other renewal ideologies in antiquity – whether, to use his terminology, they are cosmological, vitalistic or millenarian – just as, within Christianity, it must not be confused with the closely related concepts of resurrection and redemption. Its history properly begins with St Paul, receives its maturest philosophical development in the patristic age, and, as a social doctrine, in Ladner's view, comes to fruition first in the Augustinian programme of conversion to the monastic life. The idea of reform thereby illustrates a characteristic preoccupation of the post-apostolic age, the shadowy borderland between thought and action. In so forcefully tracing its growth and application, Ladner takes up questions left unanswered by those pioneers in the social history of Christian thought, Weber and Troeltsch. He also puts the subject on a new footing, one which emphasizes, as does Peter Brown, the creative continuity between the ancient and medieval worlds.

There are certain epochal turning-points in the development of reform, and, for Ladner, after antiquity, these are the pontificate of Gregory VII and the lifetime of St Francis. This position is underlined at key points in these volumes. There is a perceptive study of the early portraiture of St Francis at Sacro Speco in Subiaco and elsewhere; and in what was intended as a popular talk in 1947, he provides us with as concise and lucid a comparison between the minds of Augustine and Gregory as we have down to the present. Ladner is aware of the tentative nature of the Gregorian polity, and of the necessity of testing its doctrines subsequently through experience. "There were", he notes, "not a few deficiencies and faults in the great structure, and Gregory VII, whose spirituality was more eschatological than it was incarnational, would have been the last to be surprised" at what followed. And he adds:

> Perhaps Bernard of Clairvaux, who was both true heir of the Gregorian age and true forerunner of the age of Francis of Assisi – perhaps St Bernard, who called himself not without reason the chimera of his century, is the greatest symbolic protagonist of a necessary transition to a new kind of *Reformatio*, which is ministerial rather than authoritarian, and at the same time more personal than institutional.

Ladner complements this insight in a paper on concepts of *ecclesia* and *christianitas*, in which he uses the notion of "plenitude of power" as a vehicle for reviewing the Gregorian heritage of applied law and theology down to the opening years of the fourteenth century in the pontificate of Boniface VIII.

A recurrent theme throughout Ladner's work is the relationship between medieval and modern ideas. In his study of symbolism (1979), he sympathetically revises Foucault and Lévi-Strauss, while also utilizing the phenomenological perspective of writers like Cassirer, Gadamer and Ricoeur; and he reminds us in a witty aside that some time before the structuralists rehabilitated the linguistic approach to culture, Stefan George had written in *Das Wort*:

> I learned resigned and saddening
> Where there is no word there is no thing.

In the same essay he criticizes the absence of genuine historical intuition in Freud. He also discusses trees of consanguinity as both a metaphoric and metonymic bridge between aspects of culture in a manner congenial to the anthropological inquiries of Georges Duby and Jack Goody.

Elsewhere the sense of relevance is more specifically political. The most general contribution of this type is "Homo Viator", in which he illustrates how much thinking still needs to be done on medieval *and* contemporary notions of order and alienation. He introduces a note of common sense into the charged language of German historians writing before and after the Second World War of Otto I's imperialism in the East, pointing out that the talented and ruthless emperor was in large part continuing the well-established Carolingian policy of extending Christianity through the subjugation of pagan peoples. A similar unwillingness to desert facts for emotions distinguishes his papers on patristic anti-Judaism and on the delicate problem of medievalism in Austrian historical tradition.

"If the essence of Christianity was tragically diminished by events of Christian history, what was its lasting newness, its actual greatness?" Ladner asks this fundamental question in his subtle reassessment of Gibbon, but it is evident from the central themes of these volumes that he has often raised the question with himself. He rightly sees the answer as having a personal as well as a larger historical meaning. For him, as for his compatriot from Vienna, Stephan Kuttner, humane and religious values have long since transcended the limitations of living in an imperial society at a tragic moment in its decline. Participation in the dusk of one empire has led him to rich insights into the rise and decline of others. It is not by accident that Gerhart Ladner is one of our time's ablest spokesmen on behalf of the continuity of classical and Christian tradition in art and letters. Nor is it accidental that he prefers the idea of reform to the more dramatic notions of renaissance and revolution. The consistency of tradition has informed the pattern of his own writings, which will provide a new generation with an enviable model of sensitive, thorough scholarship. Echoing Vico, with whom, in more than one respect, his philosophical position is comparable, Ladner has written that "the history of man can be seen as a sequence of new beginnings". It is perhaps appropriate to add that in the variety, depth and excellence of these essays the writing of cultural history seems to be just that.

Twelfth-century Cypriot paintings of monastic saints in the nave of the Enkleistra, *or hermitage of St Neophytos of Paphos. They are reproduced from* Writing in Gold: Byzantine society and its icons *by Robin Cormack (270pp. George Philip. £14.95. 0 540 01085 5).*

An outpost adorned

Cyril Mango

ANDREAS STYLIANOU and JUDITH A. STYLIANOU
The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine art
517pp. Irigraph, West Africa House, Hanger Lane, London, W5 3QR. £18.
0 950802611

When Andreas and Judith Stylianou began collecting material for *The Painted Churches of Cyprus* (first published in 1964) many of the churches in question were difficult of access and barely known even to specialists. Today they can all be reached by car and several of the more important ones have been carefully restored and studied in detail – a laborious process for which the Cyprus Department of Antiquities and the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Center deserve full credit. Much still remains to be done and one cannot rule out unexpected discoveries. Even so I would venture to say that the place of the Cypriot wall paintings within the evolution of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art has become sufficiently clear.

What we see today is that the golden age of Byzantine mural painting in Cyprus corresponds pretty exactly to the twelfth century. I am not speaking of the Early Christian period, which is represented by only two groups of wall mosaics (one of them, that of Panagia Kanakaria, tragically destroyed after the Turkish invasion of 1974), everything else having fallen prey to the upheavals of the Dark Ages. The surprising fact is that the Byzantine re-occupation of the island in 965 should have left so small a mark. There is very little eleventh-century work in evidence and what remains (notably in the church of St Nicholas "of the Roof" at Kakopetria and that of St Anthony at Kellia) is of indifferent quality. But once we reach the year 1100 we find painting of the highest calibre, in all probability introduced by artists from Constantinople. Until the Crusader conquest of 1191 Cyprus remains in the artistic forefront and reflects all the major changes of style that we associate with the capital, from the noble monumentality of St Chrysostom's at Koutsovendi (c1100) to the convoluted mannerism of Lagoudera (1192). Indeed, there is hardly any other part of the Byzantine world where the progress of painting during that eventful century can be studied to better advantage. The reason for this phenomenon is surely that after the loss of Antioch (1084) and the establishment of the Crusader states, Cyprus became a crucial outpost of the Byzantine Empire and its administration was entrusted to high-ranking officials and prelates who acted as patrons of the arts.

As far as we can tell, decline set in very soon after the conquest of 1191, although I should add that we may not as yet be seeing the whole picture. Byzantine painting, identified with the Orthodox Church, seems to have been driven to the villages and what survives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is decidedly rustic, cut off from the creative centres of the times. We discern hardly any trace of the great revival of the Palaeologan period that radiated throughout the Balkans and even to Russia. Only in c1500, after Cyprus had been absorbed into the Venetian Empire, do we find again competent wall paintings, some of markedly Italianate flavour.

The Stylianous have done well to re-issue *The Painted Churches of Cyprus* in a greatly expanded, revised and better illustrated form. It is a detailed guidebook rather than a work of interpretation and will prove invaluable to the serious tourist who wishes to examine the paintings figure by figure and scene by scene. In all, sixty-two churches are described, leaving out a few significant monuments in the northern sector (eg, Panagia Apsinthiotissa, which has notable remains of twelfth-century painting, as well as some churches of Famagusta) and including a number that are of very minor interest. The text is up to date and well informed, but would have benefited from more careful editing and the advice of a professional scholar. The authors' English falters at times and the transliteration of Greek names and terms is chaotic. Some comments are pretty dotty (eg, the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera is said to reflect "the sociological upheavals in the island at the close of the twelfth century"; the concentric rings of Christ's glory in the Ascension are for some reason called Platonic, etc). I also wish that the role of Hellenism had not been invoked *à tort ou à raison* on every other page. These are small faults in an otherwise excellent book.

Aryan adaptations

Sidney Bloch

GEOFFREY COCKS
Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute.
326pp. Oxford Univerity Press. £27.50.
0 19 503461 9

Since the birth of psychotherapy at the turn of the century, its theorists and practitioners have always been influenced, knowingly or not, by prevailing social and political norms. One cannot envisage how it could be otherwise. Psychotherapy inevitably embodies a set of values. Consider for example the case of the therapist who aims to promote his patient's psychological development through an expansion of his self-knowledge and awareness of his relationships with others. In this process the therapist commonly conveys an implicit value that mere adaptation to current social norms is tantamount to self-constraint, and consequently inhibitory to personal growth.

Even when the therapist adopts a strict "medical model" – the patient complains of symptoms which the therapist attempts to eradicate or ameliorate – treatment is not value-free. The ostensibly exclusive focus on symptoms is usually coupled with another pursuit, the patient's adjustment or adaptation to his social environment. This pair of goals reflects, at least in some measure, the therapist's interest in maintaining the social status quo.

In a society where several systems of values compete with one another, psychotherapy is permitted free rein. The result is a plethora of theoretical schools, each of which pursues its own objectives – not only in terms of the clinical needs of the patient but also in accordance with the ethical premisses which underlie it. In the United States, for example, three theoretical positions predominate. Proponents of the behavioural approach aver that neurotic symptoms are essentially learnt faulty habits. Hence the patient is required to unlearn specific patterns of behaviour. According to the psychoanalytic tradition, long-standing intrapsychic conflicts, usually derived from events in early childhood, need to be detected and their significance comprehended. Any resultant insight paves the way for dissolution of the neurosis. The third theoretical position, the so-called humanist-existential, relies on certain tenets of existentialism. Particularly emphasized is the inculcation in the patient that he, and he alone, is responsible for the way in which he lives his life, and for the decision about whether he will live authentically.

Similar patterns typify the practice of psychotherapy in other societies in which the therapist encounters a wide range of ethical positions and is free to choose between them. The situation differs radically, however, where such choice is unavailable because a single ideology predominates. The Soviet Union provides a clear illustration of how both the theory and practice of psychotherapy are thoroughly moulded by an exclusive socio-political doctrine. A variant of the behavioural approach, based on the theories of Pavlov, has held sway in Soviet psychotherapy since the 1930s. The humanist-existentialist school has not even managed to gain a foothold, and for obvious reasons. A treatment which expressly sets out to promote the patient's autonomy and calls on him to assume personal responsibility for the way in which he conducts his life is diametrically opposed to the Communist emphasis on the collective and the citizen's primary allegiance to it.

The official Soviet attitude to psychoanalysis is especially illuminating. At the turn of the century and up to the 1917 Revolution, Freud's theories were accepted by a number of Russian psychiatrists. During the first few years of the Bolshevik period, some theorists even sought to amalgamate tenets of psychoanalysis with those of Marxism. The obliteration of Freudian thinking followed in the 1930s when Stalin's political hegemony infiltrated every facet of life, and Soviet psychiatry and psychology became isolated from Western influences. Psychoanalysis was branded as bourgeois and reactionary, further translation of Freud's works ceased, and previously translated material became inaccessible. This position has, on the surface, continued to prevail. Psychotherapy spread to several other spheres. For example, staff were recruited to study the psychological dimension of German industry; productivity was of the essence for a nation at war and expertise of all forms required to promote it. Particularly intriguing was the Reich's call on the Institute to grapple with the issue of homosexuality. Although proscribed by law, homosexuality hovered menacingly over the Nazi establishment Homosexual behaviour could not be branded simply as evidence of biological degeneration (the preferred Nazi attitude) when it was encountered among such "pure" Aryan groups as Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls, and even the élite SS. Psychotherapy had to be rationalized as a suitable intervention for those Aryans who had merely "blundered".

In these ways, and others, the Göring Institute confirmed its value to the State. The relationship between the two was mutually convenient, and remained so throughout the war. But Germany's defeat was also the Institute's death-knell. The Berlin premises were totally destroyed in April 1945. Göring was shortly official condemnation expressed by Professor Fedotov in a Soviet academic journal in 1958: "Precisely because of the assertion of the primacy of instincts over conscious action and the limiting of the role of social factors in determining human conduct, Freudianism constitutes a weapon of bourgeois reaction . . . The centre of contemporary Freudianism is the USA which, as is well known, is also the centre of world imperialism."

Such complete subordination of psychotherapy to State ideology would have been expected in Germany with the advent of the Third Reich. Certainly, this is what Geoffrey Cocks assumed when he began to research the effects of Nazi totalitarianism on German psychotherapy practice. But what he found in the course of his study of archival material and interviewing of German therapists was not as clear-cut as in the Soviet case. Psychoanalysis was, predictably enough, an early casualty of Nazi ideology. Although some distinction was made between the actual discipline and its originator, it was still the "Jewish" science which was promptly branded as perverse, and as inimical to the interests of the Reich. Indeed, the Nazi bureaucracy at its highest level – in the person of Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels – deemed psychoanalysis harmful, and made it a taboo subject.

Nevertheless, psychotherapy in Nazi Germany actually managed to survive the official onslaught. Indeed, it even prospered, albeit in altered form, and Cocks's book is an account of the complex evolution of its relationship with the Reich. In essence, psychotherapy underwent a process of Aryanization, disguised its psychoanalytical character, and manifested a preparedness to respond obediently to the State's requirements. This began soon after Hitler's advent to power. For Jews, the writing was on the wall. For Jewish psychoanalysts, doubly so – their careers were immediately jeopardized, their ultimate fate threatened. In the face of such a precarious future, emigration seemed the only option, and it was not long before the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society was denuded of its Jewish membership. Following the "voluntary" resignation of the few remaining Jews in 1935, the scene was set for the establishment of a new professional body. The Psychoanalytic Society was merged with the German Medical Society for Psychotherapy (founded ten years earlier). The resultant hybrid should have paved the way for the Nazification of the profession. In practice, this did not occur. While the effort to eradicate the Jewish element had succeeded, psychoanalytic theory was too attractive to be abandoned by its proponents merely because Nazi officialdom insisted on it. Although some effort was made to disguise this psychoanalytic influence (for instance, classic psychoanalytic terms were altered – Oedipal Complex became family complex), the transformation sought by the Nazi bureaucracy was far from complete.

We therefore have to suggest other reasons for the official tolerance of a form of psychotherapy which retained many of its psychoanalytical features. Cocks marshals substantial evidence for his argument that pragmatic considerations finally proved all-important. So long as psychotherapy could be demonstrated as useful to the Reich, and its practitioners were prepared to meet the Reich's requirements, it could continue to operate, even in a quasi-psychoanalytical fashion.

The Göring Institute of the subtitle was named after Dr Mathias Göring – the psychiatrist entrusted by the Reich, in 1936, to ensure that the newly Aryanized psychotherapy could and would deliver the goods. Göring was a remarkably apt choice: he was steeped in the German Romantic tradition, eager to subscribe to the ideology of National Socialism, a member of the Nazi Party, and ambitious to synthesize a new German school of psychotherapy. The fact that he was a cousin of the Nazi leader, Hermann Göring, was no doubt an advantage for his candidacy. He was therefore exceptionally well equipped to satisfy his ideological masters, and did so, generously. Cocks vividly portrays this contribution.

Predictably the Göring Institute (centred in Berlin and with branches in several other cities) played a role – especially during the war years – in treating neurotic casualties among afterwards taken prisoner by the Russians and died of typhus in a detention camp. With his death came the end of a remarkable twelve-year period during which psychotherapy, with its psychoanalytic foundations intact, had been allowed by the Nazis not only to survive but even to thrive.

Cocks has produced a fascinating account of this unsavoury chapter in the history of psychotherapy. He has also demonstrated the vulnerability of its practitioners – the ease with which they can relinquish their autonomy and become subordinate to social, political and ideological forces contrary to the interests of their patients. The Göring episode remains particularly salutary even forty years later in the light of the continuing misuse of psychiatry to suppress dissent in the Soviet Union. Therapists elsewhere may feel reassured that their autonomy is safeguarded and their integrity intact. But they need to recognize that since their task is inherently value-bound, their profession will always be vulnerable to influences which may conflict with the needs of the patients they serve.

Worse and worse

Daniel Pick

J. EDWARD CHAMBERLIN and SANDER L. GILMAN (Editors)
Degeneration: The dark side of progress
303pp. Columbia University Press. $52.
0 231 05196 4

To read late nineteenth-century textbooks on biological degeneration is to enter a strange world of social-organic theories. Even to glance at their tables of contents is to confront a now fantastic agenda of subjects: take for instance *Evolution by Atrophy in Biology and Sociology* (1899), which ranges across such "topics" as the decadence of financial institutions, crayfish, plants, leaves, the budgets of Belgium, Germany, France and England, the development of landed property, rudimentary organs in human beings, plants, worms, nations, molluscs, dinosaurs, cities, the decline of empires from Rome to China. This appears at first to be a realm of Victorian anxiety quite lost to us now, a *reductio ad absurdum* of even Herbert Spencer's more outlandish pronouncements.

Such texts can be savoured for their discursive impossibility today, like Borges's "Chinese encyclopaedia" in which animals are divided into a "series" running from "a) belonging to the Emperor" to "n) those which from a very long way off look like flies". But degeneration was a profoundly important socio-biological theme in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Racial models at the time drew upon the bipolarity of evolution and degeneration, as a putative double trajectory of history. This was to have implications not only in the history of fascism and Nazism, but also in the various eugenically orientated social policies and legislation which were debated and sometimes adopted in England, France, the United States and many other countries. Degenerationist "social sciences" took place within, and as part of, the major crisis of liberal theory in the late nineteenth century, calling into question Enlightenment assumptions about human rationality, or more commonly the political capacity of particular social groups ("hysterical" women, habitual criminals, protesting crowds, peasants, urban workers).

Practically every important contemporary writer made somewhere the gloomy speculative descent from biological "truth" (the "natural law" that "degeneration" was just as probable as "evolution", "regress" just as likely as "progress") to historical, social and political prognostications. As we are shown in this new collection of essays, *Degeneration: The dark side of progress*, such terms of reference had a bearing on the thought of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche; and the resonances of decline cut across the spectrum of political ideas from Bagehot to Mill to Engels.

Degeneration theory lurked on the horizons of nineteenth-century socialism, in the very terms in which it predicted capitalism's coming *History of Ideas*, indeed, made much of the coincidence that Marx should have been an acquaintance of England's leading zoological "degenerationist", Edwin Ray Lankester, author of *Degeneration: A chapter in Darwinism* (1880). Nietzsche too was certainly intrigued by the applied biology of Lombroso's criminology and Galton's eugenics, yet was himself deemed to be a pernicious instance of the degeneracy of modern philosophy (he was listed as such in the new genre of "psycho-pathological biography" most famously elaborated by Max Nordau).

Freud's work bears witness to the long wake of degenerationism, and in a chapter on "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration" in the present collection Sander Gilman discusses the struggle in Freud, between the theory of degeneration he inherited from Charcot and Krafft-Ebing, and his incipient psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, which called such fixed hereditary qualities into question and confronted the biological postulates of nineteenth-century psychiatry with the historical drama of individuation.

This volume of essays usefully shows the spread of degenerationist thought in the nineteenth century and gathers together some of the extensive primary material to be found on the topic. But it is a very uneven collection, and lacks overall co-ordination. In places quite abstruse knowledge is expected of the reader, whilst elsewhere it seems we need to be informed that "Friedrich Engels is most noted as the collaborator of Karl Marx". The book as a whole is weak in analysing national contexts. The chapters are divided according to intellectual disciplines (anthropology, literature, sociology, and so on), with little reference to the various cultures in which the ideas emerged and by which they were constrained.

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A Gospel nearer to truth

J. L. Houlden

JOHN A. T. ROBINSON
The Priority of John
Edited by J. F. Coakley
443pp. SCM. £19.50.
0334022738

The public reputation of John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich (later Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge), was at its height in the 1960s. On the theological scene, he seemed to epitomize the spirit of that period in Britain as well as anyone. Above all, by writing *Honest to God* (1963), he became a symbol of radicalism, a disturber of religious peace and a rocker of doctrinal boats. As a bishop in south London, he helped to embody a new mood of reform in the Church of England, in which the diocese of Southwark, under Mervyn Stockwood who appointed him, took the lead.

Yet to see Robinson as *par excellence* the thrillingly shocking radical was a misconception. The essence of the man lay less in any consistent espousal of heterodox views and reformist policies in the Church than in a constant independence of mind. He hunted with no pack for long but went his own way. His chief debts were not to the purveyors of novelty of his day, but to figures in his past (mostly family or Cambridge) to whom his loyalty was assured. His books are liable to be as full of references to nineteenth-century scholars as to those more recent, and he is inclined to dig up names long forgotten by everybody else and never much attended to even in their own day. Those who have seen Bishop Robinson as a late Victorian radical born out of due time are perhaps the most discerning. The many who failed to grasp these things about him were bewildered when, in *Redating the New Testament* (1976), he emerged as the champion of an unlikely and undeniably conservative cause – the dating of the New Testament books to the period before AD 70 and so the strengthening of their claim to historical accuracy. Both those who had once vilified but now (somewhat tentatively) embraced him, and those who saw with regret the spectacle of a radical turning reactionary as age crept on, had mistaken their man.

Robinson's work as a New Testament critic makes the independence and continuity, as well as the loyalty to past exemplars, perfectly plain. Nowhere do these features come forth more clearly than in his numerous writings on the Gospel of John, which span the greater part of his career in New Testament scholarship. That long-germinating study finds its fruit in *The Priority of John*, the full version of the work delivered in briefer form as the 1984 Bampton Lectures at Oxford, by C. F. D. Moule (as sympathetic spokesman) after Robinson's death at the end of the previous year. The book aptly conveys the essence of his doctrine on many matters that were central to his beliefs: the relation of history to concept in Christian understanding, the essential trustworthiness of the Gospels (including that of John), the sufficiency of New Testament teaching (be it properly understood) as the foundation for Christian belief. In that way, this book is his fitting memorial and the moving achievement of a dying man who maintained to the end both his own vision of fundamental things and a capacity for fastidious judgment on innumerable detailed questions.

The Gospel of John provides a sensitive test for attitudes towards the New Testament as a whole and many of the particular problems which it sets. How close is it to events behind the story which it narrates? How true to history is the Jesus it portrays? It has come to be seen, almost universally and from a number of different standpoints, as a late first-century theological reflection on the story of Jesus, written after the other Gospels and more removed from the facts of Jesus' career. In a longer perspective, it was a first sketch of the doctrinal patterns which came to characterize Greek Christianity in the subsequent period. It is true that in recent years a number of substantial dents have been made in that position. The Dead Sea Scrolls gave to many the cue for discerning numerous Palestinian affiliations in the Fourth Gospel, thus countering the prevailing orthodoxy which set it in a Hellenic light. These have come to include not only ideas and terms but also items of geography and history which betray the use by this writer of traditions at least as worthy of credence as those in the other Gospels and in some cases complementing or correcting their witness. It has also come to be widely accepted that the Gospel of John represents a tradition about Jesus which is largely independent of the Synoptic Gospels.

Nevertheless, it remains the common view that this tradition has been developed in such a way that its final form is full of evidence for the life of the church in which it was composed. Many have come to see it, especially when used alongside the Johannine Epistles, as a rich quarry for information about the history, composition and relationships of that church. In other words, authentic tradition (symbolized perhaps in the figure of the beloved disciple) may well lie at the basis of this Gospel, but it contains much else besides. It remains remote from the events surrounding Jesus, even though it is certainly far from fictional. Typically, it may be regarded as emanating from a church of the late first century, whose members were Jewish in culture and provenance and which had developed its own special idiom for relating stories about Jesus and expressing his teaching.

Robinson takes the signs of Palestinian links and authentic tradition as pointing in a quite different direction. They lead to the hypothesis that the Gospel of John has at least as good a claim to "priority" in representing the tradition of Jesus' life and teaching as the other Gospels. John is to be regarded as going back to source at least as reliably as Matthew, Mark or Luke. Where he conflicts with them, as most notably in the placing of the cleansing of the temple in Jesus' career and the dating of his death in relation to Passover, there is good reason to believe John more accurate. Frequently, John fills in serious gaps in intelligibility left in the Synoptic narrative: the rise of the movement emanating from Jesus in relation to John the Baptist is one important example, the outline of Jesus' whole ministry and the development of its various phases is another.

This complementarity takes other forms when it comes to the teaching of Jesus and to the presentation of belief about him. Robinson sees the Johannine Jesus not as teaching differently from the Jesus of the other Gospels, but as concentrating on aspects of his teaching less emphasized by them, especially those relating to the inner life of the community of his followers. In case after case, he points to statements in the other Gospels which are parallel to prominent features of John. The same is done with regard to Christology, where John's greater profundity is seen as expressing a doctrine which is not essentially novel and by no means, except by anachronism, a foretaste of later metaphysical concepts. His Jesus, like that of all the Gospels, is the man in whom God is to be perceived at work, not a deity walking the earth in human guise (and not even the figure of later orthodoxy: Robinson's independence is fundamental and his conservatism goes only where truth tells him it must).

The drift of Robinson's argument is to counter many widely accepted positions, with regard to not only the Gospel of John but also other matters. He is at pains to emphasize similarities and unities among the New Testament writers at a time when the fashion is to point out their distinctive voices. He questions the almost universal tendency to regard the witness of John as secondary in relation to the other Gospels and asserts his right to be heard as a primary witness alongside them. He holds to early dating, continuing to see this Gospel as completed before AD 70. He sets aside as speculative much recent work on the circumstances and story of the Johannine church, even though, presumably, there were such circumstances and the Gospel may show signs of them. It is here that Robinson's approach has a somewhat over-literary feel. He sees no reason to push a wedge between the evangelist and the good tradition which he includes, and adequate reason to suppose John son of Zebedee the key figure in the Gospel's composition. It is a work as close to source as any, in time, place and authorship.

Inevitably, Robinson's case, for all its keen reasoning, is cumulative, and many of his arguments are of the kind: why should it not be that . . .? A battery of such arguments has a way of bludgeoning the mind into submission, but only temporarily. When fire ceases, the effect of the assault seems in retrospect less compelling. Much depends on the reader's predisposition with regard to the character of ancient documents in general and the Gospels in particular.

Robinson's own position is not altogether clear. The impression gained is that he gives major historical value to the Gospels, including John of course, even in matters where such confidence has been very widely abandoned in the light of various theories about the manner of their composition. These matters include, most prominently, the precise course and order of Jesus' career and the nature and development of his self-awareness. Yet at many points where Robinson gives this impression, there is qualification and shying away, as if to say, "I know this is not very respectable, but here goes". Certainly, there are many cases where, while he has every right to say to us, "Why should it not be thus and thus?", we need to know why it should not be quite otherwise.

A good deal of the uncertainty arises from a fundamental obscurity. John Robinson admits that in the Gospel of John fact and interpretation, history and theology, mingle. Its "truth" in the presentation of Jesus, he says, is akin to that of Socrates in Plato as opposed to Xenophon. Yet while all his argument presses more and more into the "history" box, he never says plainly what exactly is due to the author's theological interpretation. But showing how that boundary is to be drawn or on what terms the mingling takes place, is precisely the problem with which the interpretation of the Gospel of John begins and ends.

In the line of the Prophet

Norman Calder

MOOJAN MOMEN
An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The history and doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism
397pp. Yale University Press. £18.50.
0300034997

The major sectarian cleavage within Islam, that between Sunnis and Shi'is, is conventionally portrayed as a product of historical events during or immediately subsequent to the life of the Prophet. A more rewarding analysis might be to consider that the reverse is true, namely that the crucial "historical" events were moulded, indeed created, as a result of sectarian dispute and the search to define a sectarian identity. Orthodoxy, whether Sunni or Shi'i, was the end-product of dispute; and dispute, though it embraced dogma and ritual, was primarily about history. What mattered was the manipulation and deployment of significant events in such a way that the truth was guaranteed, dogma confirmed and salvation promised to the saved sect.

In the case of Twelver Shi'ism – the Shi'ism now widely known as that of Iran and south Lebanon; and the subject of this book – the kernel of truth had to be safely conducted through the political and sectarian squabbles of early Islam, and shown to have arrived intact, to inform the lives and ideals of those who professed it (and defined it) in the latter years of the ninth and the early years of the tenth centuries. History in these circumstances became myth, formed and patterned to accord with universal human needs or the particular needs of the community; no longer a record of what happened, but a symbolism that could explain and interpret the present. Moojan Momen is to a considerable degree aware of all this and appropriately careful in phrasing his account of the origins and early development of Twelver Shi'ism. He is a little more sanguine than I (but not more than most Orientalists) in thinking that some kind of "true" narrative can be extrapolated from the heresiographical data of early Islam; but, for those who want an introduction to the issues, he selects all the right details. Here are, neatly set out with precise reference to the original sources, the major moments which constitute the matter of historical polemic and define for the individual Shi'i the essence of his religion.

An unpretentious style, interpretative clarity and basically sound judgment characterize Momen's writing. The various aspects of Twelver Shi'ism are carefully distinguished to satisfy both the general reader and the aspiring student, who is systematically directed to further reading whether of Western scholarship or Shi'ite tradition. As an exercise in writing a general introduction – and in a field where Western scholarship is patchy or inadequate – this book is a marked success.

Shi'ism emerges as an important world orthodoxy, successful because many-faceted, tolerant and broadly responsive to human needs. Its doctrine, rituals, institutions and literary traditions – of jurisprudence, of mysticism, etc – are competently laid out, and nearly always in the light of the most recent scholarship. A chapter on the popular religion neatly balances the more academic material, and a well-chosen series of photographs brings vividly to life a religion that has inspired architects and painters as well as mystics and mullahs, a faith that is proclaimed and suffered for from Beirut to Karachi. There is a demand for such a book, in the wake of recent and familiar political events. It is appropriate that the last and longest chapter should be devoted to contemporary Shi'ism, and should manage, in spite of a necessarily lengthy section on Iran and its revolution, to preserve the broad outlook and the precise writing that characterize earlier chapters. This praise is not unqualified: there is scarcely a chapter in which some aspect of selection, stress or interpretation would not inspire somewhere doubts or quibbles. But overall Momen has done his homework well.

For the Shi'a, the moment of divine intervention in human affairs, limited for the Sunnis to the lifetime of the Prophet, was given dia-chronic extension through the lives of the Imams, who, like the Prophet, were *ma'sum*, preserved from sin and error. They, in marked contrast to the Prophet, are depicted as living at best uneasily in their society. It is a parallel element of dissociation, of alienation – of the sacred from the profane, of the percipient élite from the blind generality – which may be felt, infinitely varied of course, throughout the diverse manifestations of Shi'ism; and which distinguishes Shi'ism from the more optimistic, comfortable mood characteristic of Sunnism.

Dissociation from may articulate itself as revolution against, but this, historically, has not been a particularly obvious feature of Twelver Shi'ism. Indeed there is something to be said for the view that its success, over and against earlier movements also designated Shi'i, was based on a dogmatic foundation (the Occultation) which implied to a considerable degree eschewal of revolutionary activity. The contemporary Arabic governments who worry about their Shi'ite minorities or majorities (all listed, with figures, maps and major personalities in the last chapter of this work) might find some consolation in that thought. More practically they might consider whether it were not better for the body politic that some younger and brighter minds be diverted from the allurements of medicine and engineering towards a study of culture – which matters perhaps more than contemporary governments of the Middle East or the West allow. Books and ideas become dangerous in the hands of unskilled readers. The Iraqi government at present holds Ayatollah Khu'i in virtual house arrest. Khu'i was the chief religious authority for the Arabic-speaking Shi'a of the Gulf until he was displaced in the heady days of the Iranian revolution by a more charismatic figure. In the duller post-revolutionary days he has recovered much of his status. It is, I suppose, only the academic, from his ivory tower, who would advocate as a political measure superior to incarceration the reading of his works and thinking about them. For, as Moojan Momen reminds us, there are many ayatollahs and they are not all of a kind – nor are they, as a group, entirely lacking in political wisdom.

An envoy in beggar's rags

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf

JEAN CHALON
Le Lumineux Destin d'Alexandra David-Néel
498pp. Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin.
110fr.
2262003533X

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Tibet was a land virtually inaccessible to Western travellers, and rarely entered even by Indians, other than those on pilgrimage to the sacred mountain Kailasa. Today, when wealthy foreigners can fly to Lhasa, and package tours cater for visits to the main monasteries, it is difficult to imagine the magnetism which Tibet and the forbidden city of Lhasa exerted on Westerners of earlier generations. Alexandra David-Néel was one of those who succumbed to the lure of this mysterious country ruled by a Buddhist god-king, and so strong proved the pull of Tibet that she devoted several years to travelling through the length and breadth of the country.

Jean Chalon's biography of this remarkable Frenchwoman tells us a great deal about conditions in eastern China and Tibet in the 1920s and particularly about the way of life and ritual practices of those lamas and mystics whose company David-Néel sought in her indefatigable quest for an understanding of Mahayana Buddhism and the old Bön religion of Tibet. But readers expecting novel interpretations of these ideologies will be disappointed. For since the days of David-Néel an extensive literature on Tibetan Buddhism has grown up, written partly by Western scholars who have spent a life-time studying the relevant scriptures, and partly by exiled Tibetans. Even David-Néel's vividly described encounters with reincarnate lamas are unlikely to excite Westerners who themselves have been in close contact with such reincarnations, be it in Dharamshala, Kathmandu or one of the monasteries of the Nepal Himalayas. Similarly, while in the 1920s a first-hand account of the identification of reincarnations among Tibetan boys may have been regarded as a sensational piece of reporting, today's sensations are rather the recognition of non-Tibetan or even European children as reincarnations of deceased lamas and their acceptance as genuine by monastic communities composed of Tibetans.

In view of all this, Chalon has been well advised to focus his captivating narrative on the development of the personality of his heroine. David-Néel was obviously a highly gifted woman of exceptional strength of character and perseverance, who progressed in the course of her long life through an amazing sequence of different interests, occupations and existences, ranging from that of a normal bourgeoise school-girl to successful opera singer, journalist, explorer and orientalist. Born in 1868 in the environs of Paris she led from the age of twenty a double life, moving from France, Belgium, Greece and Tunis to Ceylon and India. In 1904 she married Philippe Néel, a wealthy engineer working for the French government in North Africa, but though the spouses remained good friends until Philippe's death it would appear that David-Néal had never intended to share for long her husband's domicile and life-style. Letters from her to Philippe and some of his replies make up a substantial part of this book, and the reader cannot but sympathize with a husband whose wife spent as much as five consecutive years in remote regions of Asia without giving him any indication as to when she might return to France.

David-Néel's interest in oriental religions and cultures and her ability to write engagingly about her experiences in Ceylon, India and South-east Asian countries caught the imagination of the readers of magazines and French daily papers and earned her a reputation as an expert in oriental civilizations. Moreover the charm of her personality and her attractive appearance endeared her to European society in India and she was fêted wherever she turned up in Bombay or Calcutta. The accounts of her social success in these places tell us more about the local Europeans and Westernized Indians of these towns than about the subjects which she chose for her daily acclaimed lectures.

The climax of her experiences as an explorer and also of her international fame came in the years 1914 to 1924, when she extended her religious studies to Sikkim, Nepal and finally Tibet. Today, when explorers often rely on transport by jeep or helicopter, one must admire the physical and mental stamina of David-Néel, then a woman in her forties and early fifties, who spent month after month trekking through the mountains and icy deserts of the Himalayas, eastern China and Tibet. On these journeys she was accompanied by a young Sikkimese called Yongden, whom she had initially engaged as a servant and interpreter, but later adopted as a son. It was claimed that he was the reincarnation of a Tibetan chieftain and having received the education of a lama he was of great assistance to David-Néelle in translating Tibetan liturgical texts. When the two set out for Lhasa they travelled as mother and son disguised as pilgrims, and Yongden's unmistakably Tibetan appearance lent credibility also to David-Néel.

One of the most informative sections of the book deals with the time the pair spent at Lachen monastery. There a Tibetan hermit and sage accepted David-Néel as a disciple on condition that she submitted unconditionally to his authority. From him she learnt much about the secret teachings of Tantric Buddhism, and under his guidance ultimately undertook a type of retreat known as *tsam*, which entails seclusion in a hermitage and prolonged isolation from all human contact. From Lachen *gompa* David-Néel and Yongden moved to Kum-Bum, a large monastery in the province of Amdo, which was then inhabited by more than 3,000 monks, including a number of reincarnations. For nearly three years she stayed there, engaged in the study and translation of sacred texts and the close observation and analysis of the innumerable rituals performed by the inmates of the monastery.

During her stay in Kum-Bum she planned and prepared her illicit and hence necessarily secret journey to Lhasa. Some years earlier she had tried to enter Tibet from Sikkim, and in 1916 had got as far as Shigatse, where she was well received by the Panchen Lama, who invited her to stay in a convent as his guest. But the British Resident in Sikkim did not approve of this escapade and threatened to have her forcibly brought back to Darjeeling. David-Néel never forgot this humiliating interference with her travel plans and subsequently complained that it was the British who made access to Tibet impossible. This accusation, however, was only a half-truth since the Tibetans themselves were determined to prevent foreigners from entering Lhasa, even though to other parts of Tibet a few carefully scrutinized outsiders were occasionally admitted.

Denied the easier route to Lhasa, she decided to travel via north-east Tibet and along part of the caravan trail leading from Sechuan to Lhasa. This trek, which ultimately brought her to the forbidden city, must count as one of the epic journeys of our time. She and her sole companion had to face extremes of cold and heat, lack of food, troubles with brigands and the constant fear of being stopped first by Chinese and later by Tibetan frontier guards and officials. Their disguise as pilgrims achieved its purpose but only at the cost of forcing them to dispense with all those items of equipment which modern travellers consider essential for survival in regions of high altitude.

By December 1923, the two travellers were exhausted and so starved that they were almost reduced to skeletons. Nevertheless they dragged themselves as far as Lhasa, where they succeeded in avoiding detection and found some humble accommodation. David-Néel was usually taken for a woman from Ladakh and had no difficulty in gaining access to the parts of the Potala open to pilgrims. Ironically Lhasa was in certain respects a disappointment to her. As she had to remain incognita she could not approach learned lamas or even divulge her knowledge of ritual practices. Moreover, being dressed as a beggar in torn rags, she was treated as such and any contact with the intellectual élite was out of the question. The architecture of Lhasa did not impress her and in her subsequent letters she commented critically on the interior decoration of the Potala.

For two months David-Néel and Yongden stayed in Lhasa undetected and untroubled, but finally had to leave because they were in danger of being cited as witnesses of a lodging-house brawl. She does not seem to have been greatly depressed by their sudden departure. After all she had achieved her aim of reaching Lhasa, and would for years enjoy the fame of having been the first "white woman" to enter the forbidden city. At that time she could not have known that several European men had preceded her, having travelled along the easier route via Shigatse. Yet, for her French public her achievement of penetrating the heart of the medieval Buddhist kingdom remained throughout her life a cause for adulation and earned her gold medals of learned societies and such titles as Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur. Returning to France after spending fourteen years in Asia she found herself cast in the role of a national heroine. With publishers vying with each other to print accounts of her experiences, her reputation as a writer on oriental subjects was firmly established. Her books attained wide circulation and were translated into several languages.

Though in academic circles outside France the evaluation of her contribution to orientalist studies has by no means been unanimous, there can be no doubt that David-Néel was instrumental in arousing among Europeans of those days an interest in the culture and religions of Tibet such as had not existed before her time. Her detailed descriptions of the practices and ideals of Mahayana Buddhism have inspired many young Westerners to acquaint themselves with an ideology appealing to those disenchanted with the traditional world-view of their own civilization. Such seekers after new religious ideas can still be met in the streets of Kathmandu and in many a Buddhist

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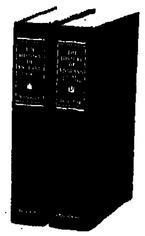

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This new edition, with modernized typography, is based on the posthumous edition of 1778, the last to contain corrections by Hume. William B. Todd, Kerr Centennial Professor in English History and Culture at the University of Texas at Austin, has provided a new Foreword in Volume I. Hume's own cumulative index may be found at the conclusion of Volume VI.
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monastery hidden in some remote Himalayan valley. There they are likely to come face to face with Tibetan lamas who are in search, not of a new religion, but of a haven for the continued practice of their Buddhist faith, which has been driven from their homeland by Chinese communists. After the destruction of more than 80 per cent of the Tibetan monasteries and the execution or imprisonment of thousands of monks, the exiled Tibetans under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, generously sheltered by the Government of India, are today engaged in a great movement aimed at the preservation and revitalization of Buddhism and its spread to countries outside Tibet. If David-Néel were alive today she would not have to journey as far as Kum-Bum or Lhasa to study Buddhist communities, but could find in Kathmandu newly built monasteries of all the main Tibetan sects, each housing large bodies of monks and novices, led and inspired by reincarnations no less credible and saintly than the reincarnate lamas she met in eastern Tibet. At a time when the Chinese threat to Tibetan culture and religious freedom was already building up it was perhaps providential that such a charismatic personality as David-Néel was able to convey the message of Buddhism to the Western world, and thus prepare at least a small élite for the time when exiled Tibetan scholars and monks would require not only asylum but also material and moral support. Chalon claims that Alexandra's role of a potential envoy, to bring the Buddhist faith to the world at large, was suggested by Lama Anagarika Govinda and was one of the reasons for the exceptional favours she had received at the hands of the sage of Lachen monastery.

Her triumphal return to France did not put a stop to her Asian travels. Though in 1928 she had acquired a property at Digne, and there constructed a building, given the Tibetan name Samten Dzong, to serve as residence, library and ultimately museum, her interest in the Far East had not diminished, and in the years 1937 to 1946 she paid several farewell visits to China. The last chapters of Chalon's book deal mainly with these visits, partly affected adversely by the Sino-Japanese war, and also with her life at Digne, where in 1969 she died at the age of 101.

Surprisingly, Chalon does not refer to the book by Jeanne Denys, *A. David-Néel au Tibet*, published in 1972 in Paris. The author of this strange publication had been engaged to help David-Néel in the rearrangement of her library, but the two ladies seem to have fallen out, and the book serves no other purpose than to disparage the personality and work of Alexandra, claiming that the accounts of her travels in Tibet were largely fantasies, that she had never been to Lhasa and hardly spoke Tibetan. The testimony of David Macdonald, the British trade agent at Gyantse, who knew David-Néel well and records in his memoirs that she spoke Tibetan "like a native" disposes of these allegations and other competent observers have also written off the accusations of Jeanne Denys, whose motive for the attack on Alexandra's integrity has never been revealed.

Jean Chalon's eminently readable book contains a few photographs of the heroine at various points of her career as well as of some Tibetans, but one misses an index and also a systematic list of David-Néel's prodigious number of publications.

Basics of *baso-basi*

Peter Carey

FREDERICK K. ERRINGTON
Manners and Meaning in West Sumatra: The social context of consciousness
175pp. Yale University Press. £21.
0300031599

Renowned for their strong matrilineal, yet staunchly Islamic, society, the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra have throughout their recorded history been singularly open to outside influences. They were among the first of the Indonesian peoples to embrace Islam in the sixteenth century, and their commercial acumen enabled them to participate successfully in the trading world of the Indian Ocean. At the same time, their custom of encouraging their young men to travel away from their ancestral homelands during their early manhood years to find fame and fortune in other parts of the archipelago, a practice known locally as *merantau*, further strengthened Minangkabau ties with the outside world. The vitality, openness, commercial prosperity, high educational standards and *merantau* tradition have meant that the Minangkabau have had an impact out of all proportion to their numbers on the history of post-Independence Indonesia.

Although Western scholars have gathered a great deal of information of an ethnographic and historical nature on this remarkable people, there has hitherto been no sustained study of the system of meaning which underpins Minangkabau social forms. It is Frederick K. Errington's signal achievement in this brief but elegantly written book to attempt an examination of the cultural process by which the Minangkabau have convinced themselves (and continue to do so in the rapidly changing Indonesia of the late twentieth century) that their social forms are not only distinctive, but also right and proper. Although his period of fieldwork in the Minangkabau Highlands was brief (a mere six months, and that entirely restricted to one village on the shores of Lake Maninjau), Dr Errington has been able to produce a coherent analysis of some of the central cultural concepts of the Minangkabau, and the way in which these are interpreted to explain social reality. He argues that the Minangkabau have evolved a distinctive style of interpretation which allows them to resolve problems of meaning in their culture, a form of interpretation which they use not only in their evaluation of individual conduct but also in their explanation of social form more generally.

The elaboration and substantiation of this argument constitute the core of the book. Errington first addresses the question of why the Minangkabau lay such emphasis on etiquette or *baso-basi*, concluding that for individual Minangkabau the wellsprings of self-interest are so strong that only by accepting the full constraints of social life can men be deemed worthy of respect – "Manners Makyth Man" indeed. Here he advances some interesting ideas about the social function of the *merantau* tradition: it ensures that many of the young Minangkabau males spend their most obstreperous years away from home and return having gone through the painful passage from adolescence to manhood in other cultures. Unfortunately, there is now a major drawback to this neat solution to the problem of giddy youth in that, especially since the late 1950s, an increasing number of Minangkabau have elected to settle permanently outside West Sumatra, only returning to their ancestral homes on special occasions. But this has apparently had little effect on the strong ties which still link most Minangkabau to their home villages and underpin their special sense of cultural identity.

After examining the Minangkabau concept of person, community and social order, Errington takes a closer look at why the Minangkabau interpret their customs so extensively, concentrating particularly on the role of the expert on *adaik* (custom) within the community and the nature of communal discussion on both *adaik* and etiquette. Finally, he assesses Minangkabau efforts to place everyday life in perspective by evaluating the rare ritual of the ascension of a man to the *panghulu* matrilineage title, and frenzy of the pig-hunt – events which are not part of everyday life, but which Errington argues are experienced as paradigmatic of the wider Minangkabau understanding of that life. Much depends here on the validity of his juxtaposition of the *panghulu* ascension ritual, which he sees as embodying ideas of constraint and continuity enabling a Minangkabau village to maintain both its distinctiveness and proximity to truth, and the pig-hunt, which, in his view, epitomizes ideas of (male) energy and force ensuring that the selfsame village will remain vital and ever responsive to outside influences.

There are clearly some lacunae in the overall picture which Errington presents, lacunae which he readily acknowledges with regard to the all-important role of women as power holders in the community and the ever-changing contours of the *adaik*–Islam relationship. But these do not really undermine his central contention that Western-trained anthropologists have hitherto been guilty of a degree of ethnocentrism in the way they have tried to explain how non-Western people like the Minangkabau make sense of their social reality. According to Errington, the Minangkabau are able to construct and embody truth in their lives through a style of interpretation which finds meaning displayed on the surface of action, in sharp contrast to the interpretative approach of most Western anthropologists, who are always striving to seek inner meanings to outward cultural forms, the fruit of a society in which there is precious little agreement about what those social forms should be. Errington makes a convincing case that such anthropologists should recognize that their cultural and disciplinary preference to interpret through symbols may be entirely inappropriate for an understanding of the interpretative "aesthetic" of non-Western peoples like the Minangkabau. They should recognize, he argues, that if they really wish to understand the meaning members of non-Western cultures derive from their cultural "texts" (like the *panghulu* ascension ritual and the pig-hunt in the Minangkabau Highlands), they should also make a genuine effort to understand the process of social interpretation itself. Only by so doing will they be able to escape from the ethnocentric trap of constantly distorting the cultural experience of other peoples through over-interpretation.

Phenomenology of *bah*

Robert Irwin

ABDELWAHAB BOUHDIBA
Sexuality in Islam
Translated by Alan Sheridan
288pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £25.
0710096089

"The dialectic of sexual ecstasy and religious faith, which is coextensive in the human being, is unaffected by variations of a socio-economic kind." The devil it is! "But will man on the inside be forgiven for objectifying a collective subjectivity in the light of which he could not but engage his own subjectivity?" Like most of Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's interrogations, this one does not seem to expect a snap answer. The Tunisian sociologist did his research at the University of Paris, and the results first appeared as the book, *La Sexualité en Islam*, in 1975. Now we have the translation.

I find the results difficult to get on with and I am not sure that his translator was any happier either. The book does not read easily and the unwieldy formulations of the Sorbonne show through. At times the translator has drifted away. For example, on p86 a whole sentence has been omitted, thereby making the Imam Raghib's discussion of Paradise as the market-place of the images of desire much more mystifying than it actually is. On p140 the Arabic word *bah*, which Bouhdiba gave as a synecdoche for *érotologie*, is moved by the translator, so that it seems to refer to "refinement". Again it is odd to find one of the works of medieval pornography discussed by Bouhdiba containing a section on "the untying of laces". What Bouhdiba certainly intends to discuss is the untying of ligatures – that is, the undoing of spells to produce impotence.

However the book was translated, it could never lose its French intellectual style, where every crisis is "a total crisis" and every context "a precise context". Bouhdiba has been inspired to tackle the erotic life of Islam from a phenomenological perspective, and he draws heavily on the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Bachelard. Merleau-Ponty's chapter on "Le Corps comme être sexué" in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* is a particularly obvious source and his meditation on the metaphysics of the gaze, where the gaze of another either steals one's body or is enslaved by it, has been skilfully re-applied by Bouhdiba to the world of the harem, the veil and the evil eye.

The materials that Bouhdiba has assembled to subject to the phenomenological gaze are fascinating – an oriental scrapbook. In part, he has attempted to present a picture of the sexual mores of canonical classical Islam. These took their shape from the Koran, the sayings of the Prophet, the interpretations of the lawyers and the practice of the community. But Bouhdiba is careful to indicate areas where ideal and practice did not correspond and he presumes that there has been a falling away in later history and our own times. He also draws on his own experiences and introspection to produce passages of lyrical eloquence on women's day in the hammam, as it would be remembered by a pre-pubescent boy. An interesting passage on the eroticism of fizzy drinks seems to be attempting to do for Coca Cola what Gaston Bachelard did for the psychoanalysis of fire, yet it remains attractively idiosyncratic.

Bouhdiba's material is fascinating and much of it is hard to come by elsewhere. What might have been separately entitled "An Essay on the Decline of the Fat Woman in Islamic History" is one among many loosely grouped similar studies. But his philosophical tastes lead him to shun the conventional rigour of empiricism. His section on homosexuality, for example, is thoroughly confusing. Here homosexuals are jumbled up with transsexuals and transvestites and the baffling set-piece of this section is the visit of the Hermaphrodite of Medina to one of the Prophet's wives. On this occasion the Hermaphrodite spoke of a certain daughter of Ghailan as having four folds on her belly and eight on her back. When the Prophet heard about the folds and more about the daughter of Ghailan's private parts, he decided to exile the Hermaphrodite. Bouhdiba does nothing to clarify the story by telling us that the Hermaphrodite later got married to a man, and then rushing on to relate a discussion about whether or not hermaphrodites should wear the veil when performing the prayer. The story of the Hermaphrodite of Medina is only here because this is roughly the right part of the scrapbook. (In fact the sense of the story seems to be that the Hermaphrodite's remarks about a woman of a neighbouring tribe led the Prophet to realize that he/she had more of the male about him/her than the Prophet had previously suspected, and so from then on the Hermaphrodite was banned from the women's quarters.)

Despite the miscellaneous nature of the supporting materials, *Sexuality in Islam* has a clear central message. However much there may have been a falling away in contemporary practice, Islam in its essence is a sensual religion, lyrical in its physicality, and its true nature can only be intuited in its harmonious totality. But this perception of a total sensual whole is the result of a subtle confusion in *Sexuality in Islam* – it is both the Koran and Merleau-Ponty. Bouhdiba comes very close to saying that Islam must be true, because it is so easy to discuss in phenomenological terms. Elsewhere there is a similar slipperiness about the arguments. The presentation of the magical nature of Islamic sexual taboos draws both on unambigous authentic Islamic traditional lore and on a Bachelardian appreciation of the magical nature of all things anyway. Bouhdiba is uncertain what to say about the veil. He does not seem to approve of it and, he argues, it is not in fact prescribed by the Koran. On the other hand, the enforcement of the veil on women can easily be understood in the light of Merleau-Ponty's meditations on the threatening nature of the gaze and can even be partially defended in anti-colonialist terms that are reminiscent of Franz Fanon. The private life of Islam remained an area which was difficult of access to white imperialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There is a fascinating evasiveness in the text, but Bouhdiba would seem to have an apologetic purpose, to reconcile an idealized traditional Islam with French philosophy of the 1960s and 70s. There are very few books on Middle Eastern sexuality that are worth looking at. For all its metaphysical problems this is one of them!

Primordial rhythms

David Gascoyne

J. M. G. LE CLÉZIO
Le Chercheur d'or
333pp. Paris: Gallimard. 89fr.
2070702472

When J. M. G. Le Clézio's *Le Procès-Verbal* appeared in 1963, it was at once acclaimed as the first work of an unusually gifted writer and awarded that year's Prix Renaudot. The originality of its form might well have suggested the possibility of annexing Le Clézio as a recruit to the by then established tradition of the *nouveau roman*, conventional character and plot structure being evidently of negligible concern to him. Within the next few years, however, after the appearance of *L'Extase matérielle* and *Terra amata*, it became apparent that this writer's preoccupations had little or nothing to do with those of his immediate predecessors, and that such affinities as he had were more likely to link him with, for instance, Saint-Exupéry or Giono. His narratives usually feature the plight of the dispossessed or exploited, and often of current equivalents of the "noble savage", set against foregrounds suffused with a sense of elemental vastness and the contrasting opulence and austerity of nature.

The present tense seems to be more frequently employed by modern French novelists than by their British or American counterparts; but few contemporary writers can have resorted to it so consistently as Le Clézio. Concomitant with his absorption in a continuous present is an impulse to unrestrained extension. "Comme il est long, le temps de la mer!" exclaims the narrator of his latest novel, the Mauritian Alexis L'Estang, resuming his obsessive search for pirate gold in the Indian Ocean on returning from service in the trenches of the First World War. His story begins in 1892, when he is eight, and spans thirty years; yet despite the dates, the novel is in no sense a historical one, but could be most fittingly described as a fable. Its characters are of quasi-archetypal simplicity, and they communicate in dialogue of taciturn breviloquence. Apart from the narrator's abiding but tenuous relationship with his sister Laure, the novel's principal human interest centres on his chastely erotic idyll with Ouma, the young native girl or "manaf" he finds on the island of Rodrigues, to which plans left him by his father have led him in search of a hoard of plundered gold concealed there by a legendary corsair. Ouma is an archetype of the order of W. H. Hudson's Rima, or Rider Haggard's "Nada the Lily" (referred to early in the book as the heroine of the favourite reading-matter of Alexis and his sister).

Le Chercheur d'or has much in common with Le Clézio's previous novel, *Désert*, which had a tribal child of nature as heroine, and contrasted the sandy wastes of North Africa with corrupt Marseilles in the same way as the Indian Ocean here counterbalances the killing fields of Flanders. In both books the distinction between the historical time gauged by civilization and the primordial time of legend and myth is implicitly drawn. *Le Chercheur d'or* incorporates a number of elements of cosmic symbolism, such as the *chalia* in the garden of the protagonist's family, which he and his sister designate "the tree of good and evil", and the cyclone which represents the deluge bringing the paradisiac period of their childhood to a close. Alexis is almost as obsessed with the constellations of Sirius and the Southern Cross as he is with chimerical hidden gold. He thinks of the ship that eventually takes him to the supposed treasure island of Rodrigues as the Argo, while the caverns he devotes himself to locating belong to the traditional pattern of initiation; a pattern which provides the primary motivation of the whole tale.

Le Clézio's aloofness from Paris and consistent indifference to its literary modes and manoeuvres prompt speculation regarding the nature of his readership. Ten years ago, in an enquiry into the poor health of contemporary literature, Julien Gracq expressed his aversion to stifling novels crammed with sour and exasperated specimens of humanity, "into which one enters as into a metro carriage at six in the evening", and deplored the tendency of writers to compound the exclusion of what he defined as "the human plant". It may well be supposed that Le Clézio's readers find his work attractive because, while scarcely distinguished by concern with the invention of individual "characters" in the conventional sense, it expresses an unusual sensibility towards a dimension wherein human beings can breathe naturally in response to the seasonal rhythms of the planet, and thereby recover some hope of achieving ultimate wholeness and serenity.

Melancholy notes

Robin Buss

DANIEL BOULANGER
Les Noces du merle
271pp. Paris: Gallimard. 79fr.
2070702529
ALAIN BOSQUET
Un Homme pour un autre
261pp. Paris: Gallimard. 89fr.
2070702227

Les Noces du merle is pegged to a sentence from Buffon describing the song of the blackbird, each phrase from which serves to introduce a group of stories. As well as setting the tone for each of the five subdivisions in the collection, the quotation illustrates something about the storyteller's art. The novelist (or, for that matter, the writer on natural history) elaborates a context; the short-story writer highlights, and by lifting something – an incident, a character – and making an entity of it, implies its extensions, just as the sentence from Buffon about the bird's song ("très-doux, très-flûté, mais un peu triste") acquires in isolation the resonance of a found poem. The subject may be as large or as small as the author wishes, sometimes, like an obituary, encompassing a whole life, though most usually one which draws its significance from a single contradiction: the successful novelist who is not a novelist ("La Gloire"), the double life of a humble employee ("La Blouse grise"), or the apparent double life of a retired schoolteacher ("Le Concours").

The stories of *Les Noces du merle*, precisely because of this compression, are slightly indigestible when taken in large quantities. There is certainly variety, more than in some of Daniel Boulanger's other collections, in theme and style. Some of the stories are written entirely in dialogue, one ("La Table du soir") with the characters Maman and Papa indicated in the margin; and there are monologues, first-person narratives and a neat parody of Robbe-Grillet ("L'Enquête") featuring a detective called Albert Volet-Millon. They range in length from one paragraph to several pages, and in setting from Paris to provincial villages and northern towns. A number take place during the Occupation. But among the peasants, priests, widowers, butchers, maidservants, widows and concierges who typically inhabit them, one soon comes to recognize the Boulanger character, isolated from the rest by some physical or mental inadequacy, or some slightly grotesque peculiarity of taste or behaviour, and encapsulated with melancholy detachment. The Buffon quotation fits: the voice of the *merle solitaire* is the music of these stories, though it is inclined to monotony.

Alain Bosquet has an equally distinctive cast of characters whom he treats with rather less sympathetic irony. The author of *Une Mère russe* is preoccupied with two things: the relationships of parents and children (his characters, unlike Boulanger's, almost invariably come from *someone*, and less emphatically from somewhere); and our inability to identify what or who we are ("Je suis, donc je pense devenir un inconnu pour moi-même", he writes, in a pretentious little note at the head of the collection). Two of the stories ("L'Ame du voleur" and "L'Enfant emprunté") have to do with adoptive parenthood as well as changes of identity, and the medium allows Bosquet to attack these themes from different angles so that his interest in them seems like quizzical curiosity rather than a gnawing obsession.

In fact, the first piece in the book, "Un Jeune Patron", is a *nouvelle*: it occupies some two-fifths of the book, the other nine stories being closer in length and scope to what one expects of the *récit*. This is no longer a popular form, in France or in Britain, demanding a degree of artificiality that may suggest it has nothing much else to say. Bosquet, a newcomer to the genre, and Boulanger, one of its outstanding exponents, prove otherwise.

Steaming chic

Dan Gunn

CLAUDE DELAY
Le Hammam
172pp. Paris: Gallimard. 69fr.
2070703517

This novel, like Claude Delay's earlier *Paradis noir*, turns around a woman's discovery of the nature of her desire. In *Paradis noir* we met Anna, who was torn between an ardent lover and a wealthy, devoted, boring husband; and here we meet Dora, torn between her love for David, her psychoanalyst, whose practice she has just left when the novel begins, and the more real or realizable love she feels she needs and deserves now that analysis is over.

In the hammam (Turkish baths), Dora sweats away her past and her anguish at separation from David. In the community of female flesh, under the soap and steam, Dora rediscovers her body. The reader is drawn into this tropical world; Dora's perceptions, and indeed Claude Delay's writing, tend inexorably to the exotic, and, initially, the hammam seems to be able to contain this tendency.

Outside the hammam, however, things are more problematic, and not just for Dora. How can the writer match Dora's intense inner world with the Paris Dora inhabits and with the narrative of discovery the novel sets out to relate? Claude Delay's answer is to add spice to one, drama to the other. Dora thus owns a gallery dealing in primitive art, and has a drop-out daughter; she meets Gilles, a budding young artist, with whom she experiences a passion unrestrained by the stops imposed on psychoanalytic counter-transference. Gilles whisks her off to Mexico and the festival of the Dead; she is recalled to Paris by David, who telegraphs to say that her daughter has attempted suicide.

Yet Dora's modish, conservative, Parisian world remains bland, even – or especially – when the author colludes in it, with knowing allusions to talismans of Parisian chic. Dora's self-discovery can only end up blurred when those around her are risible caricatures: the stern analyst, the daughter whose jeans and trainers are seen as arrows to wound, the insatiably libidinous artist; when the narrative moves, less to the pulse of reawakened desire than that of revitalized melodrama (even the festival ends up seeming like high-class Club Méditerranée); and when Dora's grief over separation focuses on not knowing the brand of David's aftershave, or the surge of desire provokes a yearning for new lipstick. At such moments the novel's plentiful generalizations about Woman may start to jar. The hammam is threatened, and the accumulation of exoticism inside it starts to irritate; the florid vocabulary and metaphors – foetuses, birth, blood, breasts, bellies, Red Brigade, Buchenwald – seem merely a way for the author to up the stakes. She concludes that "Au fond, c'est au hammam qu'elle est passée de Freud à Melanie Klein . . . de l'Oedipe au sein", and the last of the hammam's heat disappears. The verdict paves the way for a dénouement in which the author shows how the attempted suicide of the daughter gives Dora the chance to get even with her analyst. The novel ends on a twist that is as intrusive in its neatness as it is improbable psychoanalytically. Fiction and psychoanalysis meet for a final time, and both emerge the poorer.

ADELPHI

Milano, via S. Giovanni sul Muro, 14

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Elena Croce
Due città

Emanuele Severino
Il parricidio mancato

Il Libro dei Salmi
Translated and annotated by Guido Ceronetti

For personal freedom

G. P. Butler

UWE JOHNSON
Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953
264pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. DM34.
3518032186

Based on events which took place when Uwe Johnson was a student in the German Democratic Republic in the early 1950s, *Ingrid Babendererde*, his first novel, has been glimpsed in public on various occasions over the years – most recently in the second of his "Frankfurt lectures" (*Begleitumstände*, 1980); but once the manuscript had been turned down, in 1956–7, both in East Germany and by Suhrkamp, Johnson evidently made no further attempt to have it published as a whole. The present version – said to be the fourth, the one rejected by the publishers – was among the papers found in his house at Sheerness when he died there last year. Siegfried Unseld of Suhrkamp now re-tells the novel's history in a solemn afterword. He repents his own earlier, obstructive role and recalls how Johnson, although he "did not like being asked about" *Ingrid Babendererde* (as distinct, presumably, from lecturing about it), told him, "on November 5, 1983, on a train travelling from Frankfurt to Zurich", where the manuscript was, and gave the older man permission to edit it when the time came, for posthumous publication.

The story is fairly simple, as Johnson stories go, although, like most of them, it takes some piecing together. Set almost entirely in the author's favourite part of Mecklenburg in 1953, it evokes the oppressiveness, particularly for youngsters, of Stalinist Germany in full swing, and shows why on the eve of sitting their school-leaving examination (the *Reifeprüfung* of the subtitle), Klaus Niebuhr and the eponymous Ingrid have little option but to flee the country. A fellow-pupil has been told to choose between allegiance to the government's "Free German Youth" movement (FDJ), to which she and her contemporaries belong willy-nilly, and her attachment to the Protestant youth organization, "Junge Gemeinde", allegedly a tool of the Republic's enemies. In the ensuing brouhaha Ingrid is directed by the authoritarian headmaster, Siebmann, to address a school assembly summoned to discuss (ie, to vilify) the offending organization for which she in fact holds no particular brief. She speaks instead in defence of personal freedom, specifically criticizing Siebmann's party-line approach to what his charges wear, how they behave, what they read. Together with a votary of the "Junge Gemeinde" who has stood his ground against the vilifiers, stressing the constitutional legitimacy of his commitment, Ingrid is expelled; whereupon she and Klaus, who was not directly involved in the rumpus but is also a constitutionalist and very much involved with *her*, take to their heels and head west.

It's an eerie business, after reading Johnson from *Mutmassungen* (1959) to *Jahrestage* (1970–83), to see now how it all began; and it will be an intriguing one to assess just how much these once-neglected beginnings and their celebrated successors have in common. At a thematic level, for instance, *Ingrid Babendererde* is bound to throw light on some of the many references in subsequent work to the Niebuhrs, the Babendererdes, *et al*. And for students of Johnson's stylistic development (or lack of it – he was a remarkably precocious writer, no more than twenty-two when he wrote the novel and already quite unmistakably the Uwe Johnson of 1959–83), the text is of course discovered treasure. But that being said, even the rebuff which ultimately persuaded him to lay it up in lavender is not hard to understand. To have approached East German publishers in the politico-cultural climate of the time seems, at least with hindsight, naive; after all, the lakeland charms of the Güstrow district which deservedly get so much attention – the yachting, the chatting, the inconsequential small-town existence which help to make Johnson's picture memorable – serve perhaps primarily to highlight the unacceptable face of those publishers' masters' régime. The central messages, therefore, are clear enough (and surely always were – *pace* Unseld, who says they were not, for him, when he "vehemently" opposed publication), and must have been unexceptionable, indeed unremarkable, in most Western eyes: Klaus and Ingrid choose a kind of freedom denied to them "over there", and their choice is persuasively presented. The presentation overall, however, while it demonstrates that a highly unusual talent was emerging, seems likely to have had a bearing on Peter Suhrkamp's eventual veto. True, his only explicit reservations, according to Johnson, concerned the story's "lack of world", which appears to mean its strongly regional flavour, the provincialism that is in fact one of its merits – though hardly a commercial asset.

But naturally no one then was used, as we now more or less thankfully are, to Johnson's idiosyncratic ways with language (phrasing, spelling, punctuation, lexis); no one had learnt to savour his persuasive obliqueness, and even the best-disposed publishers might have been deterred by the seemingly perverse, deliberately complex structuring of the newcomer's narrative: *Ingrid Babendererde* is divided into four sections (each prefaced, and the fourth also concluding, with an italicized micro-section) made up of sixty-one subsections (in roman), and the resultant bittiness, the darting to and fro (even though, as Johnson worked out, sixty-one *is* a prime number) will never be a selling point.

Of the cast of forty-odd who act out this piece of recent reality, most are lightly sketched – parents or guardians, teachers and taught, workaday folk and officialdom – and this can engender impatience, as so often with Johnson, to see more of them. Even the fuller-blown principals, the self-possessed, almost dashing young hero and his right-minded, fun-loving, distinctly winsome companion, may arouse some such response: the story of their preoccupations and predicaments rings true, but the ring is muffled by mannerism, by an apparent unwillingness to tell it, or enough of it, like it was.

Nevertheless, all disappointments of this kind are in effect no more than a back-handed compliment; none diminishes the pleasure felt at seeing this work in print at last, and none the budding author's achievement. How might you have fared in East Germany the year Stalin died? It is a question still worth pondering, and *Ingrid Babendererde* provides a partial but well-founded and telling answer.

For all the family

Michael Butler

DIETER LATTMANN
Die Brüder
469pp. Frankfurt: Fischer. DM38.
3100432029

Although the recent German past has been exhaustively dissected and analysed by historians and sociologists, one of the most interesting sources of additional information on the history of twentieth-century Germany, in particular since 1945, has proved to be the contemporary novel. For it is in narrative fiction (and to a lesser extent in film) that the unique German experience of totalitarianism, destruction and restoration has often been most convincingly portrayed.

Dieter Lattmann's *Die Brüder* represents yet another attempt to chart the melancholy course of German history since the Weimar Republic. Like his better-known colleagues, Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass, he takes the family as a convenient paradigm through which to examine the impact on ordinary everyday life of quite extraordinary events. The emphasis lies on the years that mark the collapse of Nazi hegemony and the subsequent creation of two mutually hostile German states out of the Cold War era.

The two central characters are the brothers Julius and Johannes Ristenpart, both veterans of the First World War, ex-Freikorps and subsequently high-ranking officers in Hitler's army. The comprehensive collapse of 1945, however, produces in Julius merely disillusion with the Austrian corporal's criminal ineptitude and leaves intact his conservative, nationalist beliefs, whereas his brother experiences the manic sacrifice of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad as the decisive turning-point in his emotional, intellectual and political development. Thus, less affected by a crisis of identity, Julius is able to re-establish himself relatively quickly in the fledgeling Federal Republic, while Johannes, having begun the fight against fascism in his Russian prisoner-of-war camp, opts on his release for the "better" Germany, the German Democratic Republic.

The novel opens with a family reunion in 1976; the brothers are nearing eighty, but remain as far apart as ever in their ideological assessments of German history and their own roles in it. Against this background of division and antagonism the novel evolves as an interlocking series of memories, interior monologues and private discussions which serve to characterize the individual members of the Ristenpart clan. The controversies and tragedies of past and present have bitten deep into this once proud and closely knit family group. Julius's sons, for example, all of them deprived of their youth by Hitler's excesses, have chosen widely divergent paths after 1945: one joins the CDU, another the SPD and the third becomes a Lutheran pastor and, eccentrically, moves to East Germany to carry out his ministry.

Behind the shifting and colliding narrative perspectives there can be detected the basic recurring patterns of Cain and Abel and the more conciliatory story of the Prodigal Son. The clash between and within generations, however, has lost its bitterness; mutual incomprehension has replaced the malevolent intolerance of the Hitler years. In particular, the impact on young and old of the division of Germany – cemented for Johannes by Adenauer's revanchism and for Julius by Communist intransigence – is realistically portrayed and will find a distinct echo in West Germany, where one in five still has relatives in the East.

Lattmann is admirably successful in articulating the issues which divide families not just physically and emotionally, but ideologically too. Yet somewhat arbitrarily, he relates in detail the stories of Julius's sons, but tells us almost nothing about Johannes's three daughters and their lives in Ulbricht's Germany, leaving only the older generation to defend it. This curious imbalance is compounded by another puzzling omission: at the family reunion, Jonas, Julius's pacifist son and the main protagonist of the second half of the novel, has apparently become a socialist deputy in the Bundestag (as indeed Lattmann himself was for eight years), and although the reasons which drive him from his teaching career into active politics are adumbrated, the crucial decade 1965–75 is passed over in silence. Yet these are precisely the years of the Grand Coalition, Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the student movement, the first Social Democratic government and the birth of urban terrorism which radically affected social and political attitudes within West Germany and to which the Ristenparts appear peculiarly immune.

These are minor gaps, however, in an otherwise fascinating chronicle. Lattmann's sober prose and sense of the complexity of human behaviour are reminiscent at times of Böll, and like Böll's, his honesty of purpose gives the novel a resonance which technically more ambitious narratives often lack. Although Lattmann clearly sympathizes with the Marxist Johannes and his Social Democrat nephew Jonas and highlights their stubborn determination to work for reconciliation and constructive change, it is his achievement to have illuminated some of the intractable problems facing both Germanys without rancour and without sentimentality.

For however isolated his characters appear to be, they are presented as persistently aware of being members of a *family*. To that extent they stand for possibilities larger than their limited selves and confirm a sense of personal identity and solidarity within conflicting social systems which at times seem deliberately organized to destroy both.

For the higher truth

Colin Russ

PETER HÄRTLING
Felix Guttmann
320pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. DM32.
3472866144

Felix Guttmann is divided into three parts: the first runs from the age of Kaiser Wilhelm to the Weimar Republic of the earlier 1920s; the second covers that Republic's twilight years; the final section is the shortest, but the broadest in sweep, taking us up to 1977.

The central figure in this eventful historical landscape is the Jewish lawyer Felix Guttmann. After early years in Breslau, he embarks on professional life in Berlin, abruptly terminated by Hitler's advent to power. His subsequent emigration, his return to Germany after the war, and his death are rapidly narrated in the closing pages. We are assured that Guttmann did in fact exist. This is both a novel and Härtling's attempted re-creation of a real life – a *Geschichte* in both senses of the word.

It follows that the normally hazardous equation of first-person narrator and author is legitimized, and that the preoccupation with the exercise of memory, familiar in Härtling's work, is here especially pointed. The book reveals, so to speak, an author in search of his central character. However, not all is accessible. What Härtling does not know, he invents. Indeed, it is fiction that acquires primacy: when documentary evidence about the source figure comes to light, the author is hesitant in perusing it, lest it invalidate *his* Felix. This tension between fact and fiction is underlined explicitly and recurrently.

Is *Felix Guttmann*, then, a novel itself concerned with the higher truth of fiction, designed to illustrate Proust's assertion that invented characters are more knowable than the figures who confront us in real life? Admittedly, attempts at more obvious readings present difficulty. Thus, the new insights into modern German history and social processes which the subject might have elicited are lacking. The period detail is perfunctory, sometimes amounting to little more than a nod and a wink, as when a conversation too conveniently jumps from subject to topical subject – Fritz Lang; street fights between Nazis and Communists; Richard Tauber – or when the historical figures of Röhm and Eichmann make what can only be termed cameo appearances. On the psychological level *Felix Guttmann* is not especially enlightening, for the hero's evolution is predictable (though his passivity before the political processes menacing his world is nicely observed).

Another disappointment lies in the rather wooden dialogue. But certain scenes are finely drawn: a circle of ex-officers nostalgic for the First World War, a holiday scene on the beach that ends in Nazi violence, a visit to the embarrassed lady of an affluent household in order to fetch a refugee's belongings.

Volume Nine in the Bithell Series of Dissertations published by the Institute of Germanic Studies, London, is *Contemporary German Autobiography: Literary approaches to the problem of identity* (147pp. £9. 0 85457 127 2) by Barbara Saunders. She analyses the autobiographical work of Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, Max Frisch, Wolfgang Koeppen and Christa Wolf, relating it to the thematic and structural concerns of their earlier work.

The First Edition of
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At the breaking-point

Dick Davis

NATALIA GINZBURG
La città e la casa
236pp. Turin: Einaudi. L18,000.
8806579436

Natalia Ginzburg is famous for being able to communicate, with a subtlety and realism that few other novelists approach, what it is to be part of a family, "to live together, to sit at the same table, to have the same walls and furniture around one. . .". In her new novel, *La città e la casa*, she examines what happens when families go to pieces.

La città e la casa is an epistolary novel; in this it resembles her ealier *Caro Michele* (there are also resemblances of plot between the two works) and her group biography *La famiglia Manzoni*, though neither relies exclusively on letters as *La città e la casa* does. The central characters are Giuseppe, a widower, and Lucrezia, a married woman with five children; the two have just finished having an affair when the novel opens, and Giuseppe leaves for America, where he lives with his brother. Lucrezia is still clearly half in love with him and has another affair out of boredom and pique; this turns out disastrously but by the time she has realized her mistake her long-suffering husband has finally left for good. Giuseppe's brother dies, Giuseppe drifts into a marriage with his brother's widow and then proceeds to fall vaguely in love with his new wife's daughter by a previous marriage. Other relationships, equally unsatisfactory, equally shot through with boredom and bad faith – between Giuseppe and his homosexual son Alberico, whom he had ignored as a child and with whom he cannot make contact as an adult, between Alberico and Nadia, a girl whose illegitimate child Alberico adopts in a moment of impulsive generosity – form a background to Giuseppe's and Lucrezia's long-distance bickering about the past and what went wrong.

At the edge of the novel are people unable to form any sustained or sustaining relationships; Serena, whom loneliness has made stupid and bitchy; the sensitive, intelligent Albina whom loneliness makes pathetic and despairing and whose story, lightly touched in as it is, is perhaps the most affecting in the book. All these characters, and many others including Piero (Lucrezia's husband) and Ignazio Fegiz (her second lover) are beautifully and very economically realized; they have the force of truth, we recognize them and feel irritation and sympathy for them.

The title indicates the journey taken by the book's characters, from the familiar comfort of a house, a home where they are welcome and part of a group, to the aimlessness and anomie of the city. "The City" is Rome, and an act of spectacular, random violence in its back-streets (which it would be unfair to potential readers to describe in more detail) brings the book to its sudden and grim end. "The House" is firstly "Le Margherite", the house of Piero and Lucrezia, set deep in the country, a place that has been a rendezvous for most of the book's characters and of which they speak with great nostalgia and affection. When the marriage of Piero and Lucrezia breaks up the house is sold; it becomes an unrecognizable hotel, Albergo Panorama, and the glib, generalized name indicates what has happened to the life in the novel; what was rooted, local, specific, loved, has become general, common, a matter of strangers and of meaningless arrivals and departures. There are other "Houses" too; Giuseppe sells his home when he leaves for America and immediately regrets doing so; Giuseppe, his son Alberico and Lucrezia all spend considerable time and energy looking for a home, worrying about a house to buy; Alberico tries to buy his father's old home but fails and it is finally bought by the least sympathetic people in the book.

Ginzburg's style, an understated blend of tragedy and comedy (in an early essay she said that she discovered how to write when she realized that people in fiction should be "comici e un po' miserevole") and her subject-matter, the relationships of well-meaning but ineffectual middle-class characters, have meant that she has been compared to Chekhov. Certainly the vacancy and sense of impotence at the heart of many of Chekhov's creations are recognizable in her work, and nowhere more so than in this new novel. But her writing has become much more sombre, less comic, less optimistic; the triumphant will to live, to continue against all odds, which characterized her early work, is very muted in *La città e la casa*; there are some comic scenes (chiefly at the expense of the ineffably silly Serena), but her characters are now much more "miserevole" than "comici". They seem almost incapable of taking part in life other than selfishly; the unselfish characters are peripheral, their function is largely to see that the central characters do not give up on life altogether.

This selfishness means that the novel is full of ignored, uncared-for children; Alberico, Lucrezia's children (Giuseppe typically refuses to acknowledge the son Lucrezia says is his), Nadia's child, the child of Giuseppe's son-in-law. Two characters, Giuseppe – despite or perhaps because of his lack of interest in his own children – and Alberico, are sufficiently moved by this neglect to attempt to take responsibility for children not their own (both do so for very mixed and even selfish motives, but at least the gesture is made); in both cases the attempt finally fails and the child is taken away. This is a theme that clearly attracts Ginzburg – the generous, unsolicited gesture of protection towards new life – and which she has treated before; in her earlier novel *Tutti i nostri ieri* the character Cenzo Rena takes responsibility for the unborn child of his friend's daughter. Cenzo Renza's brusque, angry vision of life – "all men make you feel sorry for them if you look at all closely, and you have finally to defend yourself against this sudden excess of compassion" – was in the earlier novel contradicted by his own impulsive generosity: in *La città e la casa* the characters seem too tired, too worn out by experience, for generosity, and they push compassion away or, more accurately, do not have the strength to act on it; they take the advice Cenzo Rena gave but would not himself follow.

This is an excellent novel and a dispiriting one; dispiriting because the reader recognizes the desolate truth of the life the author describes. It is not, however, equally convincing at all points: the older generation (Giuseppe, Piero, Lucrezia, Albina) is much more solidly and persuasively portrayed than the younger (the film director Alberico – who is perhaps distantly modelled on Pasolini – Nadia, and their friends). This younger generation is presented as a mystery, from the outside – a recognizable mystery, but a mystery none the less, as much it would seem to its author as to the reader; whereas the older generation is presented with full knowledge, from the inside, and is thus the more convincing. A second slight problem of belief is the very large number of deaths in the novel, three of them violent (unexpected violent deaths, together with a memory of a lost, shared Eden hardly appreciated while it was present, are not uncommon in Ginzburg's work, perhaps in part because of the death of her first husband at the hands of the Nazis, a death that seems to re-echo throughout her writing). And there is, too, a stylistic problem; the author's prose style is very distinctive – clipped, deadpan, clear, seemingly impulsive but in reality extremely controlled and sure of its effects. Though the characters of her novel write their letters in recognizably distinct styles many of them tend to write like their creator for much of the time.

But these are minor cavils to set against the strength of her achievement, which is to have given us a chillingly accurate picture of human relationships in decay, of a life in which "everything is breaking up here; the whole house is going to pieces".

Aliases and atmospheres

Masolino d'Amico

ANTONIO TABUCCHI
Piazza d'Italia
134pp. Milan: Bompiani. L2,500.
Il gioco del rovescio
136pp. Milan: Il Saggiatore. L5,500.
Donna di Porto Pim
96pp. Palermo: Sellerio. L4,000.
Notturno indiano
109pp. Palermo: Sellerio. L5,400.
Piccoli equivoci senza importanza
150pp. Milan: Feltrinelli. L.15,000.

Antonio Tabucchi was born in 1943 in Pisa, where he now teaches Portuguese literature. Unlike many Italian literati, who, as Alberto Arbasino once remarked, seldom go farther than Chiasso (on the Swiss border), he has travelled extensively and his travels have inspired much of his fiction. But before writing about Lisbon, the South of France, the Azores, India, and so on, Tabucchi drew on his local background for a rather peculiar novel in three "tempi" and ninety-six small episodes, plus an appendix and an epilogue which appears at the beginning: *Piazza d'Italia* (1975), which failed to attract much attention at the time. It follows, fitfully, the destinies of three generations of rebels from the same family, in a country village close to the sea. These tough, stubborn individuals refuse to come to terms with any authority, lay or clerical; they side with the Garibaldini, then with the Anarchists, and finally, during the Second World War, the third generation becomes *partigiani* and *comunisti*. Having lost a foot while fighting for the Repubblica Romana in 1848, one of their ancestors asks to be carried to the top of the Gianicolo in order to throw his severed limb into the Vatican city below – he then writes home, "Today I kicked the Pope's ass". A hundred years later, his descendant is shot dead by the police during a strike. Times never [illegible] the author seems to imply, nor do they [illegible] but the village priest, shocked [illegible] and Nazi atrocities, throws his cassock forth as a hermit and a free-thinker. Yet Tabucchi isn't concerned to make a political statement. His peasants are "anti" by instinct and by tradition rather than by conviction; and the events, in all their gory details, flow much like sensational stories sung by a teller of popular epics.

Piazza d'Italia is Tabucchi's only long narrative. A character in his short story, "Il Piccolo Gatsby" (in *Il gioco del rovescio*) says: "No, *malgré* my old novel I shall never be able to write another, even if everybody seems to think otherwise." And indeed nothing in Tabucchi's later production looks back to that début. There the narrator, who wrote in the third person, cast a dispassionate glance on a past which seemed remote and even fabulous, with its sharp black-and-white contrasts, its heroes and villains. Today, Tabucchi is often misleadingly autobiographical, hiding under aliases and dropping recherché quotations. His assumed subjectivity helps him to establish an ambiguity which is suitable to our times. Borges, Pessoa, Henry James, Baudelaire and the shadow-world of American and French films of the 1930s are among the influences he acknowledges; Graham Greene, too, lurks under the sense of impending menace which permeates the seediness of some of his exotic settings.

Il gioco del rovescio came out in 1981. It consists of eight pieces of varying length and interest, the best being the title story, in which the narrator – a young scholar specializing in Baroque poetry, goes back to Lisbon where a woman he had once known had died, and finds that neither he nor her husband really knew what she was like. Another piece is a monologue, written in the form of a letter, by an Italian émigré in Argentina, where – as we learn in a brilliantly amusing *finale* – he thrived as a tango singer and female impersonator.

Two slim volumes followed. *Donna di Porto Pim* (1983) was perhaps too small, its ninety-six diminutive pages being mainly occupied by excerpts from old travel books on the Azores, where the narrator, for no discernible reason, has spent some time. The title story and more [illegible] expedition, are almost the only original offerings of any substance. Tabucchi's next book, *Notturno indiano* (1984), is possibly his most successful to date. Neither a detective story nor a travel book, it combines something of both genres, recruiting twelve episodes of Indian life as seen by a foreigner who is following the traces of a vanished friend. There is no denouement, or, rather, the denouement is a mild sneer at any reader who has taken the plot too seriously. As often in Tabucchi, atmosphere is paramount: settings like a brothel, a crumbling hospital, a railway train, often partaking, in a phrase the writer himself uses elsewhere, of the "startling but not surprising quality of dreams".

Finally, *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* (1985), which has won prizes, including the prestigious Campiello-Selezione, is the book that has made Tabucchi known to a wider audience. It is a collection of stories, eleven in all, set in different places. For once the title-story seems the least convincing, with the narrator looking back on friendships of his student days from the standpoint of a courtroom, where a former friend is being tried for terrorism in front of another who has turned judge. Other stories, like "Aspettando l'inverno" and "Anywhere Out of the World", are also vaguely disappointing, being too ambitious, perhaps, in their Jamesian attempt to leave many things unsaid while lingering on apparently secondary details; their point is easily lost. Most of the other stories, however, are as good as anything Tabucchi has written: "Rebus" concerns a mysterious woman, a 1927 Bugatti Royale, and a trip to San Sebastián. In the excellent "I treni che vanno a Madras", which is set in the India of *Notturno indiano*, strangers meet in a sleeping-car. "Il rancore el le nuvole" is a perfectly plausible sketch of a young man's cool-blooded university career; "Cambio di mano" an elegant spy story which takes place in New York, with shades of le Carré's world-weariness. And "Cinema", a homage to Tabucchi's favourite medium, provides the book with an apt conclusion, deftly shifting between illusion and that other facet of

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Interior tensions

Gilbert Reid

GIUSEPPE DE LUTIIS
Storia dei servizi segreti in Italia
675pp. Rome: Editore Riuniti. L16,500.

In his account of the various intelligence services active in Italy, Giuseppe De Lutiis claims that the Italian secret service, especially the military secret service, formally subordinated itself to the "NATO secret service" when Italy adhered to Nato in 1949. He believes that this secret pact was entered into in order to counter communist and socialist influence in Italy and therefore, in his terminology, it constituted a violation of "popular sovereignty". His assertion prompted a formal denial from the Defence Minister, Giovanni Spadolini, and other Italian authorities. However, *Storia dei servizi segreti in Italia*, though sometimes tendentious, confused and repetitious, is one of the very few relatively straightforward accounts of an important and extremely obscure aspect of recent Italian history. Most scandals involving the Italian secret services have concerned internal politics – alleged *coup d'état* attempts, terrorism, financial imbroglios – rather than matters pertaining to international or military espionage. De Lutiis, as he freely admits, has concentrated on scandals, on what has gone wrong, not on what has gone right.

In 1926, the OVRA (Opera Vigilanza Repressione Antifascismo) was added to the intelligence apparatus of the Interior Ministry; thousands of part-time spies were recruited to ferret out anti-fascists in all levels of society. In the mid-1930s, military intelligence, under General Roatta, also concentrated on anti-fascists and carried out assassinations as well as acts of intimidation and sabotage abroad (particularly in France and Spain).

When, in the middle of the Second World War, Italy abruptly changed sides, its intelligence services were rapidly reconstructed, under close American tutelage, and used to help the Allied war effort. Later, during the Cold War, after the dissolution of the all-party coalition government in Rome, many of the cadres of Mussolini's intelligence apparatus were reintegrated into the services, or confirmed in their careers; most of the ex-partisans, who had joined in 1943–6, were, on a variety of pretexts, gently removed. The new secret services were therefore born, says De Lutiis, under American influence and as an almost direct continuation of those operating under the Fascist régime. Whether this was a scandal or not remains a matter of opinion.

The spectacular Christian Democratic electoral victory of April 1948 stabilized the political situation, but in the mid-1950s, when the consensus established by Alcide De Gasperi began to crumble, the problems of how to govern as well as how to protect the existing system once again became acute. At this point, according to De Lutiis, both the military and the non-military intelligence service became dangerously involved in politics. Thus, General Giovanni De Lorenzo, who took over the military intelligence unit, SIFAR (Servizio Informazione Forze Armate) in 1955, decided to apply an American-inspired plan to reduce the influence of the Communist Party. In order to do this, he proceeded to build up massive and compromising dossiers on politicians and other well-known figures, going as far as planting microphones in the offices of the President of the Republic as well as of the Pope. He used the information that he obtained to acquire influence. Interior Minister Fernando Tambroni employed American-trained agents and highly sophisticated methods to build up his own extensive, often quite spicy, private archive on political rivals. This did not make him popular with his colleagues and, after a brief, violent spell as a "strong" Prime Minister, his career ended in 1960.

Following the failure of Tambroni's experiment, a centre-left coalition including the Socialist Party seemed inevitable. The vital question which concerned the security services was whether the new alliance's conduct would be moderate or (relatively) revolutionary. De Lutiis shows that General De Lorenzo, by this time head of the Carabinieri, provided persuasive arguments for moderation: in mid-August 1964 he threatened a *coup d'état*, "Piano Solo", to be carried out by the Carabinieri alone. This, De Lutiis alleges, intimidated the Socialist leaders, and thus the centre-left lingered happily and harmlessly in the doldrums until the end of the decade.

In 1968 and 1969, student protest and an unprecedented wave of strikes signalled a radicalization of public opinion. To the dismay of the secret service authorities, the Communists absorbed this protest, and consequently their influence increased rapidly. At this point, says De Lutiis, the "occult security apparatus", partly identified with the SIFAR, rebaptized SID (Servizio Informazione Difesa), invented the "strategy of tension". This consisted in terrorist attacks – bombs, assassinations – which, it was hoped, would create panic, influence public opinion, and, presumably, gain votes for the Right. The campaign was carried out, for the most part, between 1969 and 1974. It was accompanied by more innocuous events, such as when, in 1970, an opera bouffe *coup d'état* was staged by Prince Valerio Borghese and a handful of followers who, briefly, at midnight, occupied the Interior Ministry until they were told, by a mysterious telephone caller, to go home. Partial midnight military mobilizations also occurred, it seems, in 1973 and early in 1974, and caused a certain amount of paranoia, perhaps justified, in left-wing circles.

But, after the Communist Party Secretary Enrico Berlinguer formulated his proposals for a "historical compromise" in September 1974, indicating willingness to support a Christian Democratic government, these *coup d'état* rehearsals, and most of the bombing attacks, ceased. The Red Brigades were increasingly active in the 1970s and De Lutiis claims that the SID penetrated them, helped destroy the earlier more peaceful generation of Red Brigade leaders, but allowed, indeed helped, the younger more violent generation of anti-communists to take over, thus rendering the Communist Party's position even more delicate as it applied the "historical compromise".

Recent reforms have clarified the role and the responsibilities of the secret service. De Lutiis's study, however tendentious and unproven many of its central propositions are, has contributed to the debate that preceded them and to a tentative, embryonic understanding of some of the issues and tragedies that have been involved.

Disenchanted portraits

Patrick McCarthy

ENZO BIAGI
Diciamoci tutto
277pp. Milan: Mondadori. L15,000.
88 002 4575 3
Mille camere
310pp. Milan: Mondadori. L16,000.
88 002 4924 3

Enzo Biagi is one of Italy's finest journalists: he belongs to a small group which includes Giorgio Bocca and Eugenio Scalfari and where one might nowadays set Giampaolo Pansa. In *Diciamoci tutto*, a collection of articles first published in *Panorama*, *La Repubblica* and the *Corriere della Sera*, the special resonance of Biagi's voice is clear. Less polemical than Bocca and less solemn that Scalfari, who remakes Italy in every *Repubblica* editorial, Biagi is disenchanted, ironic and curiously benign.

He sees little that is admirable in contemporary Italian political life. The gulf between rulers and ruled is wide and may be growing still wider; the parties are too strong and the state too weak; one scandal "follows another and in the end cancels it out". Such criticisms are familiar, but they lead Biagi to pen unflattering portraits of Italian leaders. He is especially sharp when he depicts Bettino Craxi, the Socialist prime minister who is widely admired outside Italy for his success in reducing the inflation rate and – one suspects – for his anti-communism. Italian observers, who are closer to Craxi, tend to see in him a new version of the old Christian Democrat habit of running the state by a system of organized corruption called "clientelismo". Biagi is scathing about Craxi's attempt to cultivate a modern, classless image by appearing in public in blue jeans and sees dangers in what he calls Craxi's "arrogance". The new Italian Socialist Party is, he correctly feels, very different from Pietro Nenni's party.

Other portraits reveal Biagi's willingness to discover virtues where they are least evident. The best writing in this book is the article on the Christian Democrat, Giulio Andreotti. Now minister of foreign affairs and formerly prime minister, Andreotti is suspected of involvement with Michele Sindona, with Licio Gelli and with many other dubious characters who have infiltrated Italian political life. Most observers depict him as machiavellian, cold and amoral. While not disagreeing, Biagi notes that there is something modest and appealing about Andreotti's dislike of publicity and his reluctance to pontificate on television. He is a private man and Biagi praises him for his [illegible]

Mille camere, which also consists chiefly of portraits, is a flash-back over Biagi's professional life. Now sixty-four years of age, he surveys the people he has met or interviewed. Most of them are foreigners like Mitterrand, whom he loathed, or Harold Wilson, who told him proudly that he had never read a line of Marx. But the non-Italian reader may prefer the pages that deal with Italian writers. Here is Eugenio Montale, who tells Biagi that he does not have "much talent for living". Next comes Ignazio Silone, whose eyes are "désolate" and who is always alone. Here too is Pier Paolo Pasolini: the later Pasolini who was obsessed by what he called the "New Fascism" and who declared that the word "hope" no longer existed in his vocabulary.

It does not escape the reader that these portraits resemble one another. All have been sketched by an artist who is melancholic but feels there is a scrap of humanity in all of us. One might attempt a rash and summary explanation of Biagi's viewpoint and suggest that its origins lie in his youth, which was spent in Fascist Bologna and which he comments on in the best pages of *Mille camere*.

Biagi participated in the Fascist youth groups and belonged to the GUF (Giovani Universitari Fascisti). In 1943 he published an article in the GUF magazine, *Architrave*, which may be described – very roughly – as a critical, younger voice within the Fascist movement. Although Biagi went over to the Partito d'Azione, which had its roots in the Resistance, he lucidly affirms his solidarity with his generation, namely, those who had grown up with no political experience outside Fascism. In Bologna there were few foci of opposition and not many opportunities to escape the pervasive Fascist presence. One such lay in the contemporary French cinema and the GUF film club greatly admired Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné, to whom Biagi pays tribute here. But in general Fascism was able, even in its death-throes, to embrace and stifle opposition from the young. This inspired in Biagi's generation an exasperated frustration with politics and a belief that nothing in Italy could change. Thus Pasolini, who also wrote in *Architrave*, went through various phases of flamboyant protest but came to believe that the "New Fascism" was inevitable.

This is indeed a summary explanation of Biagi's melancholy and one might object either that post-war Italian politics has itself been sufficiently squalid to trigger disenchantment or also that Fascism was merely one phase of an Italian *malaise* that goes back much further. Biagi has elsewhere written at greater length about the Fascist years but he has not exhausted the topic and one would like to see him returning [illegible]

Premier papers

John Whittam

GIOVANNI SPADOLINI
Giolitti: Un'epoca
423pp. Milan: Longanesi. L35,000.
88 304 0561 2

Even for a Florentine with a political base in Milan and a ministerial office in Rome, Giovanni Spadolini is a remarkably versatile man. In one of the forty-five articles in this latest compilation he describes how the eminent economic historian Luigi Einaudi fulfilled his professorial duties in the mornings and pursued his journalistic activities in the evenings (a not uncommon phenomenon in Italy). Einaudi went on to enter politics and was eventually elected President of the Republic, so it is hardly surprising that Spadolini chose to emulate him. As he celebrated his sixtieth birthday this summer, the presidency is still within reach and it would be most appropriate if he could time his entry into the Quirinale to coincide roughly with the centenary of Giovanni Giolitti's first premiership. This speculation is prompted by the author's insistence that his essays and articles are to be read as fragments of autobiography as well as contributions to history. Additional justification can be derived from his conviction that all history is contemporary history and that historians are prophets of the past but can sometimes, presumably, be tempted to make cautious predictions.

Whatever may happen in the future, Spadolini has already entered the history books as the first prime minister of the republic (June 1981–November 1982) from outside the ranks of the Christian Democrats. The present premier, the Socialist Craxi, almost achieved this distinction in July 1979 but, in the event, had to wait until August 1983. Spadolini's personal popularity and that of his party seem to have increased after his premiership. This must be a unique occurrence in Italian politics.

Among historians, Spadolini will be remembered for two key works, his *L'opposizione cattolica* (1954) and *Giolitti e i cattolici* (1960). Since becoming Professor of Contemporary History at Florence and writing his first articles for Pannunzio's *Il Mondo* late in 1949, most of his historical research has concentrated on clericalism, anti-clericalism and associated themes of the Giolittian period. It proved to be a fortunate choice, because of the intense interest both in the origins of Fascism and of Christian Democracy. Newspapers as well as periodicals and publishers welcomed his contributions because of their obvious "relevance" in the post-Fascist, Christian Democrat-dominated republic. Being editor of *Il Resto del Carlino* (1955–68) and of *Corriere della Sera* (1968–72) undoubtedly helped to further his career as historian and politician, and since entering parliament in 1972 he has also appeared regularly on "la terza pagina" of *La Stampa*.

Nearly half of the articles included here have already appeared in *Il Mondo di Giolitti*, which went through four editions between 1969 and 1971, and the rest are taken from various sources, ranging from *Il Mondo* of December 1949 to *La Stampa* of December 1984. Most of Spadolini's other writings can be found in *Il Papato Socialista* (1982). He meticulously records all this in his bibliographical note at the end of *Giolitti: Un' epoca*, but it would have been helpful to have the information and particularly the date reproduced at the head of each article, in order to detect whether his views have changed significantly during the past thirty-five years. Spadolini claims to have been a disciple of Gobetti, but it was Gobetti who wanted to destroy the roots from which Fascism had sprung and he saw that they were deeply embedded in the Italy of Depretis and Giolitti. Spadolini must have gravitated more towards Croce because his interpretation of Giolitti is benign. Not for him the verdict of Salvemini, who in 1952 described Giolitti as having played John the Baptist to Mussolini's Christ.

Many of Spadolini's essays are short occasional pieces and difficult to evaluate out of context; those on Salvemini, Croce and Einaudi are the most stimulating, the one dealing with Albertini having his telephone tapped by his friend Nitti in 1920 the most alarming. All of them are worth reading because of the author's wealth of experience, not just as a historian but as a practising journalist and politician [illegible]

Salt and gravel

Peter Levi

DIMITRIS TSALOUMAS
The Observatory: Selected Poems
Edited by Philip Grundy
175pp. £9.95.
0 7022 1766 2
The Book of Epigrams
Translated by Philip Grundy
224pp. £9.95.
0 7022 1837 5
University of Queensland Press (distributed in the UK by Dent).

The Greek diaspora has been enormous ever since the Ottoman or even the Byzantine empire. It has greatly increased in modern times. Cavafy was in Liverpool, and wrote some halting Nineties-ish verse in English, long before he became a great poet. Capetanakis wrote in English and Jean Moréas in French. Seferis wrote some of his poetry in Cape Town and in London, and recently there have been excellent Greek poets writing in Greek in Canada and in Australia. Dimitris Tsaloumas is one of these; he plucked himself up roots and all and settled in Australia in the early 1950s. His exile has become more or less permanent, though he has been published by Ikaros in Athens, roughly speaking the Greek equivalent of Faber.

Tsaloumas was born on Leros and grew up under the Italian occupation; his early poetry was written in Greece. His memories of this period in some of the later poems sharply evoke the life of his island and of Patmos in those days. Simply as historical documents they are invaluable, and utterly convincing. (He has among other things the ear for conversation of a short-story writer, though I do not know that he has ever published any Greek prose.) He went to Australia in the aftermath of the civil war, and in order to learn English, and for some time he wrote no more Greek poems. But whatever it is that makes a poet write did not die. He has published seven books in the last ten years, is now in his mid-sixties, and his achievement is substantial.

The Observatory includes poems selected from all these volumes, and presented in Greek with facing translations. Very few foreigners indeed would otherwise penetrate Tsaloumas's language, which is demotic, highly specific and sometimes I think local in tone. It has escaped the flattening process that the radio and the newspapers and urban life have imposed on spoken Greek in the last thirty years, as of course poetry should do. The translations are clear and not unattractive, but English is a flatter language, and fidelity blunts the fine edges of the original. The style of the Greek recalls Ritsos and perhaps Seferis, but the subject-matter, being a personal experience of life, is highly original, and the language extremely lively and sparkling. Tsaloumas belongs to the generation of the Resistance and of Takis Sinopoulos, with whom he shares a seriousness, a demotic vigour of phrase and a laconic lyricism: he speaks for that generation without mincing his words.

He can be bitterly ironic or intensely sad. The recent poem "Worship", in which "the flame of verse abandons the idols of loves / and heroes", is closer to our world, but its despair is powerful.

> I make to worship
> but in my ears the words of sages frown
> and their voices forbid. What then
> if I can read you now the yellowing of the leaf,
> the dregs in coffee-cups, the messages of war.

His two most recent books have been called "Epigrams", and *The Book of Epigrams*, which appeared in Greek in 1982, has now been translated complete by Philip Grundy and issued in the same lavish format as *The Observatory*; it contains a hundred poems, roughly the length of sonnets. But Tsaloumas has written longer poems and a poem-sequence. The strongest and fullest statement in *The Observatory*, "The Sick Barber", about two hundred lines long, is set in Patmos during the Second World War.

It is not really possible to place Tsaloumas accurately by reference to other writers. He is something that was missing, and happy the language that possesses such a poet. The poems are not always easy; they belong to the modern movement. But they are memorable. Those few of the translations that are by the author himself are noticeably bolder and more striking as English poems. In Greek they are all bold and striking. Grundy, who has produced most of the English versions, has performed a most difficult task with a remarkable degree of success. The problems of translation into verse are terrible. "Hyena's teeth that smiled in the moon, and you thought I'd brought you pearls" becomes "Hyena's teeth, my dear, moon-smiling snarl, and you believed I'd come with gifts of pearls". The English poet's attempt to extract the essential core of meaning is perfectly justified only when you can read the Greek as well. As verse the English is too smooth, almost too poetic, and "My dear" is unnecessary except to convey tone. But that unhappily is the tradition of English verse. It is the reason why, lacking regional poetry, lacking salt and gravel, we need to read poets like Dimitris Tsaloumas. The Australians sensibly and generously gave him their National Book Council Award for 1983. Unesco sponsors verse translation; the Arts Council has sometimes done the same. I would like to see the European authorities sponsor a series of verse translations with facing text in all the European languages. A book like this (the physical production of the book is admirable, and better than most English or American books at the present time) should be their model.

Failure and the family

Peter Mackridge

PHILIPPOS D. DRAKONDAIDIS
To spiti tis thias
202pp. Athens: Kedros.

The past few years have seen a marked increase in the influence of Latin American writing on Greek fiction. Philippos D. Drakondaidis himself has published translations of Spanish and Latin American writers; the situation depicted in his new novel is a typically Greek one, but there is perhaps some evidence here of the presence of Latin American influence, both in technique – rambling monologues, shifts from one speaker to another with no explicit warning – and in the treatment of family and national history.

Written with humour, *To spiti tis thias* (The Aunt's House) explores lack of moral purpose, dejection and failure. Its main plot concerns the efforts of Nikos, an employee of a Swiss pharmaceutical company in Athens, to persuade his wife's aunt Koula to leave her house in Salonica to the couple. Nikos's career in this respect is littered with ironical twists. His wife nurses the aunt after a bad fall, for which the local police initially (but unjustifiably) accuse the couple of being responsible. Then one of Nikos's colleagues, who is having problems with his mistress, asks him to visit the girl and tell her she is no longer wanted; whereupon Nikos initiates an affair with her himself. One of the ploys used by the reluctant lover is to have the girl transferred to Salonica, where Nikos asks her to keep an eye on the aunt. This task she performs so successfully that when the aunt dies soon afterwards the couple find to their astonishment that she has left her house to the girl. Nikos and his wife are left to face mounting inflation with an inadequate income: a failure that comes to symbolize Nikos's general failure in life.

Although the central plot covers a period of only a few months, there are many returns to earlier periods by way of the reminiscences of various characters, evocations of Greek history over the past seventy years and quaint tall stories told by Koula's former lover, including an account of how Columbus landed on an islet off Corfu in the belief that he had reached the West Indies [illegible]

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Fashionable fictions

Francis Cairns

PAUL VEYNE
L'Élégie érotique romaine: L'amour, la poésie et l'occident
245pp. Paris: Seuil.
202 006555 X

The four Roman love elegists, Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid, wrote in the latter half of the first century BC, mainly in the reign of Augustus. The origins of Roman erotic elegy are still debated, as is the influence of the first elegiac poet, C. Cornelius Gallus, a mysterious individual who was also a powerful general and governor and who killed himself in 27/26 BC after falling from imperial favour – a fact which may explain why all but a few fragments of his work failed to survive. The other elegists have survived in their entirety; and it is clear that elegy was a fashionable, if not the most fashionable, Augustan literary form, partly because it offered an outlet for frivolity at a time when the régime which had put an end to Rome's long civil wars and political dissensions was becoming increasingly serious and respectable. In the intervening centuries the reception of Roman elegy has been mixed. It interested ordinary Romans in the first century AD enough for lines to be scrawled up on walls at Pompeii; and in the same period it was admired by Quintilian as a challenge to Greek elegy. But it never entered the Roman school curriculum, so that its survival was tenuous and, in retrospect, almost miraculous, with, in most cases, single Carolingian manuscripts bridging the gap between late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

In the Middle Ages Ovid regained the cultural dominance which he must have had in Augustan Rome. In the twelfth century (the *saeculum Ovidianum*) his language and thought (the latter also mediated through the vernacular *Ovide moralisé*) again allowed men to speak with more freedom and safety in the presence of a dominant, unitary ideology. Propertius and Tibullus lagged behind Ovid in medieval popularity, not surprisingly since they wrote for a less popular taste. In effect they came into their own only in the Renaissance; and even then they had to wait longer for their transition from Latin to the vulgar tongues. In Germany Goethe was, as in so many areas, the pioneer with his "Römische Elegien"; Cowper and Thomson had made Tibullus an Englishman a little earlier; but Propertius entered the English-speaking consciousness only in the twentieth century, in his transformation by Ezra Pound.

The fates of the Roman elegists at the hands of scholars have been parallel. Ovid's relative straightforwardness has on the whole protected his text against deformative emendation, transposition and misinterpretation. But Tibullus has been rewarded at various times for his subtle connections of thought by being categorized as a rambling dreamer or a psychological defective, and for two centuries his work appeared as the Renaissance had reshuffled it "to make sense". Tibullus' indignities are now, for the most part, over; but Propertius continues to suffer macabre brutality at the hands of uncomprehending "emenders", who imagine that, having read a Latin grammar, they know the language better than he did. Nevertheless the steadily increasing critical concern with Roman elegy over the last hundred years has been generally beneficial; among older landmarks the Tibullus commentary of K. F. Smith (1913) and the Propertius commentaries of P. J. Enk (1946, 1962) stand out, together with the monographs of J.-P. Boucher, *Études sur Properce* (1965), and G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (second edition, 1969). In the past twenty years their successors have produced a stream of further monographs, commentaries and periodical papers; and interest in Roman elegy is, if anything, still on the increase.

Paul Veyne's *L'Élégie érotique romaine* is written for a Francophone public with intellectual and literary interests. This audience is assumed to have a nodding acquaintance with the ancient world, but not more; Veyne takes for granted, however, the intelligence and literary experience of his readers. The first sentence of his book reads: "C'est une des formes d'art les plus sophistiquées de toute l'histoire des littératures" – and Veyne is unrelenting in pressing this point. The elegiac poet (or speaker), who is called "*ego*", is a fictional construct, as is the lady who is the object of his affections, an equally fictitious quasi-deified ideal. The poets were primarily poets, not lovers. Sincerity lies in their art and not in their emotions. Real and fictitious events are blended in a Rome where Hellenism is a natural, everyday thing. The elegiac poets are mannerists and Catullus is the source of much of their mannerist art. These ideas are worked out in connection with the main themes of Roman elegy – love, pastoral interest, mythology, the "slavery of love". Translations and interpretative paraphrases are woven into the exposition. Veyne offers a satisfyingly sophisticated account of what he correctly characterizes as the most sophisticated genre, elegy.

It should of course be said clearly that none of this is a revelation for English-speaking students of Roman elegy. The introduction to Smith's Tibullus commentary made abundantly clear the fictionality of the elegiac lover and his experiences, something already documented in many a late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German thesis; and the conventional and "generic" nature of Roman elegy is currently the accepted working hypothesis among specialists everywhere. It must also be said that the detailed interpretations of particular elegies offered by Veyne are not particularly new or striking.

But Veyne's book is by no means of use only to the Francophone or the general reader. It could indeed be particularly beneficial in the English-speaking world, because of the curiously persistent naivety about literature among some Anglo-Saxon classicists. This takes several forms, not all coexistent – a positive antipathy to any kind of theorizing about literature, a wish to treat literature as straightforward source material for history, a clinging to the belief that poets (or at any rate "good" poets) express their "own" "feelings", a determination to link "sincerity" directly with the accurate reporting of real-life events and the expression of real-life emotions. Some blame for all this must lie with the English educational system and its over-narrow specialization; the influence of late-Victorian poetic anthologies, both English and classical, with their Romantic bias, also remains powerful. The result is a widespread lack of knowledge of or interest in literary theory and in the nature of poetry among English-speaking classical scholars and with it some recent attempts in periodical articles, and in at least one book, to revive the "biographical fallacy". It is in this context that Veyne's book will be helpful, particularly since his intellectual background is historical and sociological (his earlier books are *Comment on écrit l'Histoire*, 1971, and *Le Pain et le cirque*, 1976). Instead of assuming in the Anglo-Saxon manner that literature is simply more grist for the historian's mill, Veyne approaches the problem from the opposite direction with the question "Given an immensely complex and sophisticated society and culture, what kind of literature will mirror its complexities and satisfy its intellectual and emotional aspirations?" The fact that his answers amount to the working hypothesis of the majority of literary specialists in elegy is a striking independent confirmation of that hypothesis.

That Roman elegy was written by historical figures in a specific historical context and reflects a specific society is undeniable. Veyne has shown that from a socio-historical point of view this implies anything and everything other than the biographical fallacy. The erotic content of Roman elegy can for practical purposes be defined as pure fiction. This year has seen commemorations of the bimillennium of the presumed death of Propertius, presumed because his last datable work belongs to 16 BC. An alternative fantasy might involve a Propertius who did not die in 16 BC. Short, bald, fat and fifty, and very tired of being teased by his friends at Rome about the contrast between his poetic persona and his real circumstances, he retired late in 16 BC to his country estate near his native Assisi. As he climbs the steep hillside one spring morning two years later to attend a council meeting there, he wonders whether the twinge in the big toe of his right foot is a stone in his sandal or the return of his gout. He tries to put out of his mind the echoes of his wife's morning nagging and the grinning faces of his four not very pleasant children and to turn his attention to a more pressing worry, the effect of current prices on the family wine business.

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Competition No 246
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than October 25. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct – in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 246" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on November 1.

1 Behold the apples' rounded worlds:
juice-green of July rain,
the black polestar of flowers, the rind
mapped with its crimson stain.

2 Again, some fruits pass under the name of Adam's apples, which in common acception admit not that appellation; the one described by Mathiolus under the name of *Pomum Adami*, a very fair fruit, and not unlike a Citron, but somewhat rougher, chopt and cranied, vulgarly conceived the marks of Adam's teeth. Another, the fruit of that plant which Serapion termeth *Musa*, but the Eastern Christians commonly the Apples of Paradise; not resembling an apple in figure, and in taste a melon or Cowcomber.

3 I said to Heart, "How goes it?" Heart replied: "Right as a Ribstone Pippin!" But it lied.

Competition No 241
Winner: J. M. A. Williams
Answers:

1 The story is familiar
Everybody knows it well
But do other enchanted people feel as nervous
As I do? The stories do not tell.
Stevie Smith, "The Frog Prince"

2 She let her golden ball fall down the well
And begged the cold frog to retrieve it;
For which she kissed his ugly, gaping mouth –
Indeed, he could scarce believe it.
Robert Graves, "The Frog and the Golden Ball"

3 Frog has no nerves,
Frog is as old as a cockroach.
Frog is my father's genitals.
Frog is a malformed doorknob ...
Frog is a soft bag of green ...
Anne Sexton, "The Frog Prince"

Flights of the night-travellers

Peter Winch

HANS PETER DUERR
Dreamtime: Concerning the boundary between wilderness and civilization
Translated by Felicitas Goodman
462pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £17.50.
0631 133755

If there is one thing on which contemporary Western culture, officially as it were, prides itself, it is the central place it gives to inquiry and research of one sort or another and hence, so one might think, to the development of understanding of the world in which men and women live and of their place in it. Of course, these pretensions have also often enough been questioned, sometimes by powerful and influential voices. Usually, though, the disturbances so created die down soon enough, and the mainstream of our intellectual life, as embodied in our sciences, our philosophy, our educational institutions and so on, resumes its complacent course. Those who raise fundamental difficulties about our culture's deepest preconceptions cannot expect to have much perceptible effect on that mainstream in its long-term course; and for that very reason the raising of such difficulties can never become redundant or lose its importance.

Thank goodness then for Hans Peter Duerr, whose book *Dreamtime*, now that we have this excellent translation by Felicitas Goodman, deserves to be as widely read and discussed in the Anglophone world as it has been in Germany since its first publication in 1978. The great importance of its central theme, and the seriousness with which it is treated, do not prevent the book from being tremendous fun. It is bursting with anthropological material which few could fail to find fascinating; it is witty, irreverent, often devastating in its criticisms of some of the leading figures in our intellectual culture (though not *all* Duerr's missiles quite find their target). In these ways, as well as in his fascination with all things human, Duerr often reminds one of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The affinity with Rousseau perhaps goes deeper. A fundamental concern of both is to explore what should be our attitude to other men's beliefs. Rousseau remarked pregnantly that to know what other men believe is an evil in the absence of knowledge whether those beliefs are true or false. He was attacking a merely manipulative attitude to our fellows in which knowledge of what someone else thinks is merely a useful lever for influencing his behaviour. This, he thought, leads to no proper understanding of the other; it also prevents a man from learning from others and thus impedes his own self-understanding, thereby incidentally exposing him to manipulation by others in his turn.

Duerr's outlook is similar to this, though the focus of his inquiry is different. He is interested in the attitude anthropologists (and others) may take to beliefs and practices current among people at other times or places, which *prima facie* affront the understanding of ourselves and of the world on which our contemporary Western life seems to us to be founded. In such cases it may be difficult even to see what a serious inquiry into the "truth" of the beliefs in question might amount to, since the form of such inquiries that is familiar to us fails to get a purchase on them. For instance, in many parts of the world and at many points in history we encounter stories of men and women undertaking magical "flights", often after using certain potions or salves. What is a contemporary anthropologist or historian to say about this? The life in which his own understanding of the world (and of himself) is embedded makes absolutely no room for talk about people flying, outside children's fairy stories, Walt Disney films, accounts of dreams, and the like. To put the point more strongly, outside such contexts what he understands the verb "to fly" to mean hardly permits him even to attach any sense to anyone's assertion that he has undertaken a flight, except as the expression of a deranged intelligence or hallucinated senses. So the possibility of an inquiry into the truth of such an assertion seems not even to arise.

It would be conceptually insensitive to express this point by saying that since these witches', shamans' and others' assertions that they have flown are obviously false, there is no point in any inquiry into their truth; though this has not prevented very many, including some who were in a position to know better, from saying just that. The insensitivity lies of course in the refusal to face the problems of meaning involved in such claims, a refusal buttressed with an insistence that the only way open to us to understand such claims is to find a "translation" of them into something we can already say in our own language. Such an attitude effectively blocks off any possibility of our understanding of things actually being extended by paying attention to the claims of the shamans. But that possibility is also blocked by the relativist reaction to such dogmatic insensitivity, which takes the form of putting the meaning of the shamans' reports entirely beyond the reach of Western understanding.

Duerr on the one hand why has suggestions about the historical reasons why these difficulties in understanding are particularly acute and intractable within Western civilization; and on the other hand he has a theory about how it is possible and why it is important for us to increase our understanding in these matters. The suggestions and the theory are interconnected elements in a single argument.

Civilization, in Duerr's view, involves a renunciation of the natural world from which, however, civilized men are separated by only a narrow fence. Because it is a renunciation, civilized life can only be properly understood through its relation to what is renounced, the "wilderness"; but precisely because civilization is essentially such a renunciation, the wilderness is inaccessible to it. The consequence seems to be that civilized man *cannot* understand himself, since this would involve his stepping outside the bounds of his civilized life in a way that would involve the loss of all human understanding (this being essentially a product of civilized life). But there are some whose practices – and whose altered states of consciousness associated with those practices – enable them to step with one foot across the boundary into wilderness without entirely leaving the human world: the night-travelling followers of Diana, shamans, werewolves and so on. They, Duerr argues, can understand the nature of civilization in a unique way, through both belonging to it and yet being able to step outside it. And we too can, he seems to add, if we resolve to, learn something from them.

We may wonder what is to be gained by this. Duerr cannot answer this question in any detail. What he does is to point to some of the evils of our civilization, many of them generally acknowledged these days, which he ascribes to the efforts we make, not to understand our relation to the wilderness, but to cultivate it and thereby annihilate it. In doing this we are not, as we might think, extending the bounds of our civilized existence, but cutting it off from its roots. Duerr sees the Christian Church and positivistic science as the two main agencies in this self-destructive process; it is not altogether clear whether he takes their activities to have a common source.

I do not mean it as a criticism that the book raises more questions than it answers. The danger, which is an aspect of the situation it describes and criticizes, is that too many people will not bother to think seriously about them because they are convinced that they already possess the answers. I do hope, though, that when Duerr takes these questions further in his next book he will not let so much of the wilderness into its organization. *Dreamtime* has only 133 pages of text to 237 pages of notes and 92 pages of bibliography and index. The copious references in the notes are not individually indexed. All this makes the book much harder to read, the basis of the argument much harder to evaluate and its references much less useful

AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Bentley's *Politics without Democracy 1815–1914* was published earlier this year.
Sidney Bloch is the author of *Soviet Psychiatric Abuse: The shadow over world psychiatry*, 1984.
Archie Brown is a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford.
G. P. Butler is Professor of German at the University of Bath.
Michael Butler's *The Plays of Max Frisch* was published in July.
John Butt is a lecturer in Spanish at King's College, London.
Frances Cairncross is Britain Editor of *The Economist*.
Francis Cairns is the author of *Tibullus: A Hellenistic poet at Rome*, 1979.
Norman Calder is a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Manchester.
Peter Carey's study of the British period in Java between 1811 and 1816 will be published shortly.
David Carlton is the author of *Anthony Eden: A biography*, 1981.
Raymond Carr's most recent book, *Puerto Rico: A colonial experiment*, was published last year.
J. Mordaunt Crook is the author of *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream*, 1981.
Dick Davis's translation of Natalia Ginzburg's essays, *Le piccole virtù* (The Little Virtues), was published earlier this year.
Masolino d'Amico is Professor of English at the University of Rome.
Michael Edwards's *Towards a Christian Poetics* was published last year.
Kyril FitzLyon is the author, together with Tatiana Browning, of *Before the Revolution: A view of Russia under the last Tsar*, 1977.
Peter France has just completed a study of Rousseau's *Confessions*.
David Gascoyne's *Journal 1936–1937* was published in 1980.
Christopher Hitchens is Washington columnist for the *Nation*.
Jennifer Hornsby's *Actions* was published in 1980.
J. L. Houlden's *Connections: The integration of theology and faith* will be published next year.
Robert Irwin's *History of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria* will be published later this year.
Peter Levi is Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford.
Mary McAuley is a Fellow of St Hilda's College, Oxford.
Patrick McCarthy is the author of *Camus: A critical study of his life and work*, 1982.
Peter Mackridge is a lecturer in Modern Greek at the University of Oxford.
Andrew Mango was responsible for BBC Turkish broadcasting for fourteen years.
Cyril Mango's most recent book is *Le développement urbain de Constantinople*, which was published earlier this year.
Adam Mars-Jones is the editor of *Mae West is Dead: Recent lesbian and gay fiction*, 1983.
Virgil Nemoianu teaches Comparative Literature at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.
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Marcia Pointon's most recent book, *The Bonington Circle: English Watercolour and Anglo-French landscape 1790–1855*, was published earlier this year.
Gilbert Reid is Director of the Canadian Cultural Institute in Rome.
Sir Steven Runciman's books include *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 1977.
Colin Russ is a lecturer in German at the University of Kent.
George Steiner's *Antigones* was published last year.
Brian Stock's most recent book is *The Implications of Literacy*, 1983.
Michael Tanner is compiling a complete critical discography of Richard Wagner.
Tzvetan Todorov's *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogue principle* appeared in English translation earlier this year.
T. O. Treadwell is a lecturer in English at the Roehampton Institute of Higher Education.
Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf is Professor of Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
Robert Wells's *Selected Poems* will be published next year.
Anne Whitmarsh is the author of *Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment*, 1981.
John Whittam is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Bristol.
Bernard Williams's most recent book, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, was published earlier this year.

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